

**APPLES BE
RIPE**

APPLES BE RIPE

Books by the same Author

CONFESSIONS OF TWO BROTHERS
(with John Cowper Powys)

EBONY AND IVORY

THIRTEEN WORTHIES

BLACK LAUGHTER

SKIN FOR SKIN

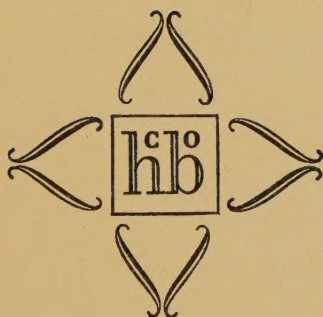
THE VERDICT OF BRIDLEGOOSE

HENRY HUDSON

THE CRADLE OF GOD

Apples be Ripe

LLEWELYN POWYS



HARCOURT, BRACE AND COMPANY

NEW YORK

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first edition

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
BY THE QUINN & BODEN COMPANY, INC., RAHWAY, N. J.

Dedicated with love and appreciation to

H. RIVERS POLLOCK

*whose sturdy English character,
liberal, generous, not to be budged,
I have had knowledge of for a
quarter of a century*

WHY MEN ENTER HEAVEN

MEN are admitted into heaven not because they have curbed and governed their passions, or have no passions, but because they have cultivated their understandings. The treasures of heaven are not negations of passion, but realities of intellect, from which the passions emanate, uncurbed in their eternal glory.

The fool shall not enter into heaven, let him be ever so holy. Holiness is not the price of entrance into heaven. Those who are cast out are all those who, having no passions of their own, because no intellect, have spent their lives in curbing and governing other people's by the various arts of poverty and cruelty of all kinds. The modern church crucifies Christ with the head downwards.

Woe, woe, woe to you hypocrites!

WILLIAM BLAKE

APPLES BE RIPE



ONE



IN THE daytime the low-pitched roofs of the old Vicarage showed grey against the green of its creepers, while on moonlit nights, under the realmless sky, its broad, thin, closely packed slates gleamed bright. Those slates protected from the weather six human beings—a clergyman, his wife, their only son, and three servants. Once under this shelter they were safe. January snowstorms could come driving against that secure covering without harm done, and for whole days in spring, summer, autumn, and winter the west wind would strike against it and yet be impotent to penetrate these squares of thin matter.

The house had been built in the early days of the reign of Queen Victoria and presented to the world an appearance of grave stability. It would have been impossible for such a structure to be the product of unsettled times. It was clear that the builders who had raised it, stone upon stone, had felt no misgivings about the future. They knew they were working upon a sound soil. The constitution of the royal realm of England was secure. The earth, to them, was hung upon well-balanced hinges.

Across the drive to the north, opposite the front door, was a tennis lawn, while on the south side of the house three tall windows looked out upon a number of gay flower beds, each one of which was separated from the smooth green levels of grass by abrupt, crumbling, lobelia-high precipices. Beyond and below the tennis lawn was a terrace walk with a sloping herbaceous border on its near side, and on the other an iron railing which separated the gravel from a number of undisturbed West Country orchards. To the north of the house stood an old-fashioned kitchen garden surrounded by a high wall along the top of which Chris, the clergyman's small boy, used to run.

The Rev. Thomas Holbech was a proud and reserved man. He had inherited from an ancestry largely Celtic a deep inarticulate love of nature. Although he cared nothing for poetry, his temperament was essentially a poetic one. His surface mind believed what his fathers before him had believed, but the physical constitution of his whole being could tremble with a purely animal gusto for life that it would have been difficult to reconcile with the propriety of conventional religion. This lust for existence did not display itself in personal waywardness; the inhibitions of his traditional upbringing lay too heavily upon him for anything of that kind. It showed itself, however, in a naïve exultation at the mere fact of his own consciousness, in a kind of strange jubilation that he, the Rev. Thomas Holbech, the son of David Holbech, had been born

at all. There were times when this particular form of individual consciousness seemed able to merge itself into the simplest manifestations of nature, so that this good man, this pious clergyman of the Church of England, would suddenly feel himself at one with the insurgent force that compelled the dull garden soil to unfurl petalled anemones, and that clothed the surly winter fields upon all sides with lucky meadow grass, damp and succulent.

When still only a child his son had occasion to appreciate the power of his father's animism. He had climbed out of the wide-open dining-room window after "Bible reading" with his mother, and had hurried down to the terrace walk on the lookout for white butterflies, which he wanted to catch in order that he might spread out their wings upon his new cork setting-board before any *rigor mortis* stiffened their beauty. He had no sooner reached the terrace than he heard his father's footsteps coming down the kitchen garden path. With the accuracy of a child's observation he knew that it was his father's custom to take a turn round the garden each morning before he retired to the earth closet behind the thick-set privet hedge. Being shy, or perhaps afraid of meeting his parent face to face, he hid himself at the back of the syringa bush. For the rest of his life those lovely cream-coloured flowers, so heavy with the sweet perfume of June, were associated for him with what he then witnessed. Whenever he smelt them it would be the same. In a single moment he would be transported over the dividing acres, over the dividing

years, until he felt himself crouching again with mould-dusty knees behind that bush, while before him, up and down, backwards and forwards, paraded this man, his own father, his noble countenance contorted by a mad and uncontrollable animal transport, for no better reason than that he was alive in such fair weather, with apple leaves growing to a darker green, with a red-haired cow licking up the afterbirth of its slippery calf near the elder hedge, with the ants all alive on the dry soil between the pansies. Chris had been terrified. He had looked at that unknown face, elongated, baboon-like, and before the violence of so abnormal an emotion he could only hold his breath in awe.

The little boy's mother was very different. She came of a family with literary traditions, and herself had a passion for reading. Scarcely had her child been weaned when she taught him to lisp poetry, reciting to him from Longfellow, from Tennyson. She was a remarkable woman, a woman with a will that could be bent backwards, but never broken. She herself had bent her will backwards so that it might conform to the set tastes and habits of her husband, but although to the outward eye it would seem that she had renounced everything, actually her spirit was never really yoked by those long years of formal subjection.



TWO



IN THE later years of his short life it became Chris's custom to brood upon the salient sensations of his early childhood, sensations that had helped to mould his thoughts and conduct. He would torment himself with trying to recapture the scattered memories of the first awakening of his consciousness. Although they were so casual and so apparently without significance it seemed incumbent upon him, as an intelligent human being, to value these original, dim, mist-enclouded experiences with the same intensity of interest that it was his avowed purpose to bestow upon the last uncertain hours of his life when his personality would be slipping back once more into the gulf of oblivion. These early dream-like recollections would often possess his inner vision when he was about the most incongruous occupations, when he was looking over school examination papers, or climbing through a field hedge to meet a girl!

On such occasions, suddenly, without warning, he would be back at Batemore Vicarage, sitting on the nursery floor near the horsehair sofa with his nurse Clare standing over him, so fresh in her crisp white apron; or sitting on the knee of one of his mother's friends and endeavouring like some lusty Gargantua, until he received reproof, to undo a blouse which in some odd old-fashioned manner was buttoned down

the front. Or again in white frocks he would be running out of the way of a carriage that had unexpectedly entered the drive, with butterflies about him everywhere in the heat of an early summer afternoon.

Often before he slept his mother used to sit at his bedside and sing hymns to him, holding his hand and looking down upon him with her deep-set brown eyes. And in summer time, with the air of the garden just perceptibly moving the night-nursery curtains, those curtains so faded and yet so light and fresh, and with the twittering of the eager sparrows in the massed clematis outside the window, and with the laughter of lovers in a distant lane, there would come over his spirit a sensation of a deep and infinite peace, mingled with a sense of infinite sadness as though for a moment his immature intelligence had understood without further demonstration that the insistent beauty of the visible world was in actual fact but a dream without punishment or purpose.

It was on one of these evenings that his mind first fully grasped that sooner or later his mother had to die. His small mortal body, under his calico nightgown, shivered. "What are you crying about?" his mother asked, but the child would not answer. The knowledge that death could come and touch with his chill fingers a being so necessary to his happiness, so tender, and so beloved, made him desolate. What was this presence that threatened to intrude upon his peaceful garden life like a black unspeakable visitor, for ever lurking in the shadows?

As a matter of fact it was not long afterwards that what he had dreaded actually happened. He was exactly nine years old when his mother died. She was ill only four days.

The small boy laid this up in his heart. There was, however, nothing abnormal or neurotic about him. He played games with eager delight. His joy was without stint. Nothing that he did seemed dull. After luncheon in the autumn, before starting for a walk with his governess, he would run up to the apple loft to fill his pockets with walnuts and ribston pippins. The smallest event was weighted with interest—the sight of a mouse darting behind a bundle of hay! And when his walk was over and he was sitting at the schoolroom table sewing, while his governess read, how cosy and warm it was! Although he never forgot that his mother was left out in the rain, left alone with her beautiful hair in the mud, yet even so it was possible to be happy in the quiet room.

The boy would be absorbed in his employment, selecting coloured wools and weaving them in and out of a piece of white canvas; then when he would hear the first clatter of the tea things in the pantry he would again feel a wave of happy well-being to think of the dining-room with its heavy green curtains fast drawn. "Miss Plimpton, I do love you," he had quite irrelevantly exclaimed to his governess, and she had laughed. After tea she would sometimes play with him at hide-and-seek. Once the boy crept into the drawing-room. The room was dark. He lay

on a bearskin near the piano and waited. And again surrounded by the crowded invisible furniture with the dusty smell of the long black hairs of the dead animal in his nose, he experienced the old dream-like sensation, as though it would be no very hard matter to step clean out of this life that he knew. Yet the grave prayers of his father seemed to give all that he experienced a reliable foundation. They were beautifully worded, and merely to look at that grey head "talking with God" filled the boy with reassurance.



THREE



WHEN he was ten years old Chris caught scarlet fever. He was isolated at the end of the house. After six weeks he was allowed to go out in the garden for the first time. It was the beginning of September. He was very weak. He emerged from the still hall, from the cool darkened hall, where a wasp was making its murmur as it circled about a jug of home-made lemonade, into the blazing light of the out-of-door world. He never forgot the renascence, the abrupt and striking revelation that came to him of the painted beauty of the earth! Here on this sheltered enclosure of English ground the magic and mystery of the planet lay exposed and apparent.

The child was staggered, amazed. Was it possible that use and wont could so dull the senses that this startling splendour had never been realized before? The insistent brightness of the geraniums, of the asters, of the stocks, in that novel moment registered an impression that throughout all the difficulties and agitations of his life was never overlaid. For ever afterwards he suspected, he knew, that any commonplace acceptance of the visible world was due, not to the importunacy of mere occupations, but to sheer grossness of perception, men, women, and children going to the grave in groups unaware, unawakened.

That September was a particularly fine one. The departure of summer seemed delayed. September wore the very aspect of August, the flowers of the earlier month came to their prime in the second. No trees showed signs of fading. As Chris grew stronger he was allowed to stay out after tea. During one of these long evenings he was amusing himself by bouncing a ball against the coach-house door. Far up above the grey slated roof the swifts were darting backwards and forwards. In the creepers which grew on the wall of the house above the water tank the sparrows were chirping. From across the road came the sound of men's voices at work on the allotments.

Weary of his solitary game, he presently wandered down into the yard. He was possessed by a listlessness impossible to define. He was happy and yet profoundly unhappy. His governess, he knew,

was dressing for dinner. He had caught a glimpse of her bare arms at the window. He went into the stable. The old family horse turned its head and put forward its soft sweet-smelling muzzle as the child opened the loose box door. The smell of horse's urine, of horse's dung, clean and sanitary, assailed his nostrils. For a few moments he sat upon the corn bin. The evening light which slanted through the dusty window illuminated a row of empty bottles and a broken curry-comb that stood on the sill. The slanting shaft of yellow attracted the child's eyes, and immediately his attention was arrested by a drama that was being enacted in this corner of the stable. A large fly was desperately struggling in the meshes of a cobweb; its wings made a low monotonous fluttering sound. An old malignant spider was advancing warily towards her prisoner. She hesitated for a moment, inspecting its predicament, and then darting upon it, concealed it in a horrible embrace and with bowed head, in spite of the fly's tremulous spasms, began to suck out its life-blood. The scene completely relieved the boy of his twilight enervation. What he witnessed filled him with a horror to which he consented. The spectacle physically stirred the child. He felt abashed before what he was looking at, and yet at the same time he secretly concurred with it. He felt that at the back of his father's prayers, at the back of the hymns his mother had been used to say to him, there lay a living secret—a secret full of dangers and also of unspeakable rewards.

He slipped off the wooden chest and went out again into the yard and then, as he was passing the tool-house, he noticed a number of summer moths fluttering in soft contentment about the everlasting peas that grew against the wall of the shed. A large white Puss Moth touched with its silky abdomen one after the other of the hardy pink blossoms. The boy caught it in his small fist and with hurried guilty steps carried it to the very centre of a group of currant bushes. Slowly and with sultry long-drawn-out deliberation he pulled off the wings of the captive insect. Like a corrupt oriental princeling he stretched himself out voluptuously under the bitter-smelling fruit trees. No sooner was he satisfied than he was startled by the change that came over his emotions, as abrupt as it was unexpected. What a moment before had seem permissible, had received, indeed, a kind of indulgent sanction, now by some inner oracle of his very being, in a twinkling of an eye, in less time than it took a swift to fly about the end-room chimney, was regarded in an entirely different light. The grey body of the moth thus artificially changed into an obese, quickly moving, excitable caterpillar, was crawling about in a blind undirected way over the mould. The boy now could not bear to see it in its mutilated state. In an agony of remorse he beat it to death with the fragment of a tile. Slowly he crept from bush to bush towards the yard. Suddenly he heard his father's voice and lay still behind a group of wide burgeoning horse-radish leaves.



FOUR



IT WAS arranged that Miss Plimpton should take Chris to the seaside for a few weeks. The place selected was on the Devonshire coast. Throughout October the weather remained good, and the two employed themselves happily enough either resting on the beach or going for walks. They stayed in lodgings a few doors away from the one large hotel of the place, and Chris as he sat in the bow window of their sitting-room would often notice a little girl going in and coming out of the hotel with *her* governess. Presently he came to watch for her. She was about his own age. She wore her hair in plaits, and from the first, in his eyes, her red tam-o'-shanter and the swift movements of her little body seemed to set her completely apart from everybody. He could recognize her small figure from a great distance. She seemed to him different from all other girls, dedicated and presented by a unique destiny. If he came upon her unexpectedly in the town he felt himself turning scarlet and would be aware of a sinking sensation in his belly. He was in love with her, he knew it. But who was she and how would he ever be able to tell her that he loved her, he who did not dare so much as to lift his eyes as she came by, her small hand trailing against the iron railings of the gardens? Sometimes he would see her go out

for a drive with her mother, a tall fashionable woman who sat very stiff and upright in her carriage, drawn by two glossy high-spirited bay horses. But although the little girl played her part well at the side of her mother, it was quite evident that she found this daily duty dull, for Chris discovered that as soon as the elder woman had entered the hotel and the carriage had turned the corner which led to the mews, the child, in a moment, would be on the back of one of the horses, riding postilion, quite heedless of the protests of the coachman, with whom she was a great favourite. Chris would pass the equipage coming down the street, the small rider jolting this way and that, flushed and excited. "Thank you, William," he heard her say one afternoon as she climbed down from the back of the horse near the stable door. She spoke the words with complete composure, and giving the man a confederate smile, was away and out of sight down the street.

When Chris came up to the horses all smelling of sweat and harness-polish, he heard the old coachman remark to a serving-man, "Yes, she is a regular madcap, is Miss Flora. She'll do what she's minded. It is not no words that will stop her, but what her Ladyship would say if she knowed of this is more than I would like for to hear. 'Tis a wonder the gelding do remain so quiet." So Flora was the girl's name. Chris carried that away with him, a treasured secret.

The next morning when he was being hurried

home by his governess, who did not like to be late for lunch, he saw the girl's figure in the far distance clambering on to the narrow sea-wall that ran above the beach. He immediately got on to it at his end, in spite of Miss Plimpton's protests. The two children approached each other along the causeway littered with tiny accidental pebbles. The wall was narrow, and on the side of the beach there was a drop of about ten feet. They drew nearer and nearer, and then in an instant were already past each other. The girl had noticed him, had looked at him, had given him a shy half-pouting smile as she glided by with her speckled tennis shoes balanced on the very edge of the parapet. He now jumped down and joined his governess on the pavement. Just before they entered the town street, however, he looked back, and Flora also was looking back, and beyond all expectations waved a handkerchief.

It was the most important thing that had ever happened to him. He wanted to brood upon it by himself alone. It was a memory so rare that, as he poured water out of a large flowered china jug to wash his hands in his cheerful bedroom, the seaside sunshine and salt seaside smells seemed nothing to him. In the dining-room downstairs he hardly tasted the fish that the governess had not wanted to get cold. Flora must know how he loved her. She must have known by the way he had looked at her on the wall. To wave at him proved she must love him. Girls did not wave their handkerchiefs at boys unless they were in love.

That afternoon, scan the beach as he might, he could see no sign of her. It was the same after tea as he sat at the bow window. He felt restless and longed to go out.

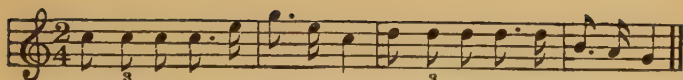
Presently Miss Plimpton asked him to take some letters to the post. He closed the front door with eager restraint and set off in the direction of the sea. The twilight beach was still empty of her figure. There was no sign of her anywhere, neither on the esplanade nor near the deserted boats where he had sometimes seen her loitering with the fishermen. He was returning by the little path at the back of the town when they suddenly met. It was already dusk. She stopped short when she saw him. This time they were by themselves. They were both possessed by shyness. They stood hardly daring to look at each other. She was carrying a twisted handkerchief in her hand. "I have to put these back in the sea," she said. "I found them on the rocks. I thought they were periwinkles, but they are not. Nobody knows I am out."

"I will come with you," Chris said, and they began running together side by side. When the shells had been safely placed in a small pool the two children retraced their steps. The little girl presently put out her hand and held his. "So you like me," she said.

The next day all his efforts to meet her were unavailing, and the following morning the hotel bus conveyed him and his governess to the station. It

was impossible for these two children to direct their destiny. They were like slaves that had met and had been separated. When he was home again he thought of her constantly. He came to associate her with the sights of nature that especially entranced him. It was sufficient for the image of her to enter his head and life would seem charged with an exciting import, tender, sweet, and strange.

The following spring he had another significant encounter. It was April, and he had gone bird-nesting by himself. His walk had taken him near an outlying cottage, and as he passed under the thorn hedge that surrounded its garden he had stopped for a moment to listen to the sound of a flute. An old village character, Will Baxter, was playing to himself under the shade of a walnut tree. He caught sight of Chris and called him to him: "If thee do bide and listen I'll teach 'ee to play." From that day Chris used to pay continual visits to this old man. With the hollow instrument to his lips he learnt the lilts of a hundred country ditties. All through the summer he sat on a form near the thatcher. "I do know more than thee's father," the old man would remark with twinkling eyes and shaking beard. "The church bain't all, and don't 'ee forget that, me son. 'Tis merry to drink in summer and merry to drink in winter. Bread be good and victuals be good and no pulpit words can gainsay that. I'll teach 'ee a melody what old John Salt taught I sixty years gone by, he what lies by the girt yew tree under churchyard wall."



Ap-ples be ripe and nuts be brown, Pet-ticoats up and trousers down.

Though Chris only half understood the significance of the rhyme, he never heard it without experiencing a secret forbidden exultation. The old man with the apple-green waistcoat would catch the grave look on the child's face, and would laugh till his belly shook. "I bain't a-growed old and not learned som-mat. I bain't no scholar, that's sure, but I do know what I do know and no book larning could teach I better what thick little pipe can sing."



THE long-anticipated day when Chris was to leave Batemore Vicarage for his first term at school had arrived at last. It was with no small sense of pride that he was summoned to his father's study after breakfast. He sat on a chair by the heavy mahogany table, and as he timidly raised his eyes from a giant stick of red sealing-wax lying in a silver tray, he received a reassuring smile from his parent, as if to say, "Ah, my son, son of my loins, you are now about to take your first step out into the world."

His father on this occasion spoke little beyond mere commonplaces. Chris was about to leave the shelter of his home and enter into new surroundings; a school was like a small world, and he hoped that he would remember what he had been taught and would avoid having anything to do with badly brought-up boys. Throughout his life he must behave himself like a Christian and a gentleman. At this point the old man took out his purse and produced a gold sovereign. "Here," he said, "is your pocket money, but you must be careful not to spend it recklessly; and I would like you," he added, "to remember to write to me every week." These last words brought with them a sense of great desolation. Chris did not want to cry before his father, but as he sat on his chair with his legs crossed under its seat he felt certain of his facial muscles' insubordinately stretching themselves for an outburst of tears. The tension, however, was relieved by his father's suddenly saying, "Now if you will kneel down we will say a few words of prayer." Mr. Holbech was accustomed to address God as he might have addressed his own father, whom he had always greatly respected. "O almighty God, protect, I pray thee, this young child who is now about to leave his home for the first time. Shield him from all dangers whether of the body or spirit. Let him surround himself with good companions and walk in the paths of uprightness. Watch over this child and lead his footsteps into the way of peace. Keep all that is impure and sinful far from him and let him

so order his life and number his days that he may grow up to do good in his generation. Through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ thy only son our Lord. Amen."

While these words were being uttered Chris had been able to control himself. He was impressed by the solemnity of the moment and a feeling of its importance, so that when his father rose and gave him a kiss and told him he might go, he left the room in a grave mood, but with perfect command over himself. Together with the emotional experience of the interview he carried out of the study two superficial impressions—the look of a broken button on the upholstery of the chair against which he had been kneeling, and the sweet smell that came from his father's prickly chin when he had kissed him, like the smell of some very fresh and healthy animal which had been lying in bracken.

The first of the "last days" before going to school passed rapidly. His governess read to him during the afternoon, and as he lay by her side on the lawn his mind, with its troubled uncertain anticipations, sought peace amongst the branches of an elm tree on the other side of the orchard, which had formed themselves at a certain height into a dark cavern of enshadowed foliage. When next summer he saw again this familiar recess of greenness he would have returned from his first year at school! Presently the bell rang for tea. He was amazed that the regular procedure of the day could go on just the same, that the housemaid, Mary Hooper, could bring in the

toast and "the master's egg" as if there were no seven o'clock train.

The events that happened to him during that first term bit into him. Never again was the clumsy brutality of life to be more apparent. Boys have a genius for cruelty. They are gifted with an unerring psychological insight. They know exactly how one soul differs from another. Any peculiarity that is individual cannot be hid from them. Let the galled mule wince once, and never again, not for a moment, will the blows be misdirected.

Bewildered by the newness of the scenes about him, by the clamour of the opening of tuck boxes, by the harsh sound of the school bell crassly rung for prayers, by the stampede which followed towards the dining-room, by the gruff voice of the schoolmaster (far gruffer than his father's) declaiming the Psalm that begins "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, Bless his holy name," Chris crept half dazed into his bed. Everything seemed terrifying and unwonted, the incomprehensible jocularities of speech, the bare scrubbed passages, the striped holland blinds of the dormitories!

He woke early, long before his room companions. Merely to think of the sweet security of his home brought tears to his eyes. The unhappiest day at Batemore would be how full of bliss in comparison with the wretchedness of his present exile! He cried quietly to himself. Presently his nostalgia caused him to feel as if he were going to be sick, and he

put his hand under the bed for the chamber pot. Before he could touch the object he was sick in the passage between his bed and that of his neighbour, called, so he had already learned, "the cow stall." He had waked the boy next him, who no sooner opened his eyes than he took in the situation in a flash. "Holbech, the dirty little cub, has been sick into his shoe," he shouted with malignant glee. In a second four little boys were out of bed and had come to inspect what had happened. "He must have a 'trade-mark' from all of us," they shouted, and without more to-do they bared Chris's back and proceeded to strike him with their flat hands until the impressions of their fingers were left upon his skin. "We will spread it all over the school," cried one child with blithe animosity. "Dirty little cad, we'll teach him how to behave."

This same little boy was head of the dormitory, and when the first bell rang he issued a command that all of them should spend five minutes on their knees saying their prayers. Chris spent those minutes in wild stupefied supplication. He associated God with his father and mother and the happiness of his home. He felt overwhelmed with shame, with fear, and his soul shrank from the dreary burden of the days that were before him. As one of his tormentors was opening a round tin of carbolic tooth powder he heard him say, "Yes, we will spread it all over the school and get him put into Coventry."

Towards the end of the term a flock of ewes was folded for lambing in a field next to the school rail-

ings. Some of the elder boys in off moments would approach the wattled hurdles to see what was going on. They would return from their expedition with much laughter and talk, talk that would frighten Chris. One evening he entered the lower form room to find a gathering of these adventurers in whispering consultation. Immediately he knew what they were talking about, and with the hot blood coursing through his veins he drew near. "And then she lies back." These were the only words he was allowed to hear, because as soon as his presence was known a clamour arose against him. "Go away, you are a parson's son—you mustn't hear what we are saying." He went out, closing the door behind him, ashamed of his temerity and yet still troubled by his disturbing curiosity. What a sweet enervating sensation was this un-understood subject capable of arousing in him!

In the summer term when the soft July light of evening lay upon the grey town, when in every direction delicate green leaves shadowed and gently touched ancient masonry, when in the bland evening the faded yellow wallpaper of the dormitory whispered its immodest secrets, Chris would go to bed trembling with languor. "If only I could be allowed to put aside the petals of one lovely rose so that I could *know* its beauty, its mystery!" These strange intimations were clearly understood by him a year later when, with the other boys, he was allowed to attend the town chrysanthemum show. It was late in the afternoon and the hall was brightly lighted.

Extravagant blossoms raised their heavy heads in the centre of the room, each plant held upright in its pot by the help of a thin stick. Girls in pretty frocks and boys in white collars moved slowly about from one place of interest to another.

The sister of one of the day boys sat on a platform superintending a sixpenny dip. Her long dark hair lay as naturally as a pony's on her shoulders, so prettily covered with her white silk blouse. Chris was far too shy to patronize her particular amusement, but it happened that as he passed her a small coin dropped from her hand and rolled onto the floor. He ran to pick it up, and as he raised his head he found that his position had taken her at a disadvantage. A significant, understanding glance flashed between them. It was not this glance, however, that ravished his senses for so many days afterwards, but rather the smile that she gave him a moment later full of shameless conspiracy as she deliberately moved with the sole intention of providing him with still more excitement.



SIX



CHRIS's public school days consisted of a prolonged strife between the official schoolmaster's view of life

and the secret ill-defined purpose of his own individual waywardness. There were months when his spirit capitulated to the prejudices that prevailed and when he would attend the chapel services, night after night, with a handful of the more religious boys, taking his place in a darkened pew of the school chancel and listening with a strained spiritual ear to the deep-toned voice, now loud, now soft, of the venerable headmaster. It was on one afternoon as he watched a cricket match, with the white-flannelled athletes moving so regularly to their appointed places after each "over," that what he really intended suddenly became more clear to him. He would like to preserve his purity. He wanted to achieve this ideal state set before him by his monitors, but equally he could not imagine a moment when in the face of any real temptation of the senses he would hesitate as to the choice he would make. Immature as he was, a still small voice deep in his soul emphatically told him that to abstain from such opportunities meant death and to accept them meant life. Slowly, month by month, existence unfolded itself to his eager senses. As summer passed into winter and broke again with cold winds into spring he recognized more and more the deep heritage of the gift of consciousness that was his. He would see to it that it should not be wasted, that it should not be his lot to have his sensibilities dulled, nay, stolen from him, by a set of copy-book maxims. There was more in all this than was apparent at first. Adventures would come to the adventurous.

Poetry itself was in no way confined, and under the direction of his beloved house master he bathed his mind in the restoring wells of his country's more inspired language. He found soon in this mood of liberated awareness that no event could take place without his being able to absorb something of its inner quality as from a spectacle from which he himself was detached.

When in the winter holidays the flooded fields of Sedgemoor were frozen and he spent the day skating over these wide flats he would derive from the white featureless landscape, with here and there the top of a gate or a tall pollarded elm tree standing out against the sky, an impression of an absolute romance existent in, but at the same time outside, reality. It would still be so when he returned to find that all was astir in the old home kitchen in preparation for the choir supper. He would slip into the schoolroom where the table was laid, and carry off some of the sweetmeats from the sideboard—dried figs tough and full of little seeds—and then after he had entered his bedroom and had emptied the hot water from its can covered up with a towel and had washed and dressed, he would present himself in the drawing-room for the arrival of the village guests. To see these excellent men at the supper was something not to be forgotten. With their plates heaped high with roast beef and Yorkshire pudding they would call to the busy maids for more vegetables. "Here, Mary, bring along they sprouts," or "Where be tatties? I do want more

tatties." And after it was over and Chris's father would be organizing a game of bagatelle, himself taking the cue in hand with a deliberate concentration and a laugh towards the company when his play went amiss, Chris would escape out into the garden, and crossing the lawn, stiff with frost, reach the summer house. He used to like to go walking alone on such frosty nights. He would often take the way to the cottage where old Baxter had lived before he burst his bladder by a fall. A Scotch fir grew by itself on the side of the thorn hedge, and he always remembered how on one particular night he had hugged its huge trunk in a veritable ecstasy of realization as he looked up at the stars so unimaginably far away from the white sparkling meadow, and had tried in a protracted state of concentrated attention to break down the limitations of his imprisoned mind, to win an escape from his environment through this form of disciplined objectivity. This method of natural prayer became a habit with him, and its practise was so potent of solace that he used to hope that in his own death hour he would by this means become fortified in the presence of the final inevitable shock, which, since his mother's illness, he had never ceased to dread.



SEVEN



AT LAST he was old enough to leave school, and after a summer spent at home he was taken up to Cambridge by his father in the early autumn. The old man, who was about seventy years of age at that time, was moved by memories of his own undergraduate days. The rooms and the college quadrangles appeared to his eyes the same as he had known them fifty years before; the streets were also the same. Driving from the station, they passed the University Printing Press with its square tower which suggested the tower of a church. "The freshman's church," as his father laughingly called it. One of the college servants recognized the aged clergyman, and to the boy standing by the edge of the well-cropped lawn the long inconceivable years of the past seemed suddenly to fall apart, to gape and let him through as he observed that salutation so taken for granted, so unsurprised. The father made certain necessary purchases for his room and spent the afternoon hanging pictures, busily occupied in his white shirt sleeves driving great nails into the old panels, while Chris stood below, a little insubordinate, holding in his hands anything that might be required. At last these decorating occupations were over, and the two sat side by side at the table. As upon the occasion of his preparation for his first

term at school, a prayer was said. Scarcely were they risen from their knees, however, when his father missed his pocket knife. Remembering perhaps ancient depredations, his suspicions fell forthwith upon the bedmaker, an old woman called Mrs. Wing, who had already, on more than one occasion, made her appearance in the room. "She surely would not have begun taking things quite so soon," said his father, looking at his son with the expression of rueful self-conscious distress adopted by people who have lost their belongings and cannot tell what to make of it. The pocket knife at the moment was lying concealed under a piece of brown paper in which the nails had been bought, and in a short time was duly recovered. They now went out of the college gates, side by side, to buy a writing-desk which could be locked. As they had come down the stairs his father had read the name "Steadfast" painted at the entrance of the doorway: "I wonder if the man is true to his name," he said. Chris loved his father, but he also loved his independence, and he experienced no small relief when his parent finally took his departure.

Now he was free to live as he liked, and he forthwith went off to buy himself a bottle of gin and some tobacco.

The old University town made a deep impression upon him. Years afterwards he could recall the exact look of the famous boating river as he sat upon its bank for the first time and saw its waters, level almost to the green grass, wind their way under the

shadowy trees across the flat meads of the country. Here in this city the past was as the present, and the present as the past. Two small engravings of his college had always hung above the chimneypiece of the dining-room of his home, and he could never approach its gates without a sensation of unreality. A glamour, scholastic and peculiar, hung forever about the buttresses, about the leaded roofs, of these hostels of learning. Their cobblestones had been worn bright by generations of feet long since turned to dust; the very moss on the walls, the very ivy leaves on the Old Court, large and dusty, whispered of antiquity. His father, his grandfather, his great-grandfather, had brushed by these corners, had loitered upon the bridge by Queen's College. Lord Byron, with his handsome aggressive head held high, had glanced over his shoulder at Chaucer's mill as he advanced towards his bathing-pool. Wordsworth had hurried into Chapel, tripping over the hem of his long white surplice. Laurence Sterne had sat jesting beneath the Jesus walnut trees, had dropped his excrement into the jakes there. And, above all, Christopher Marlowe had blasphemed on Corpus sod. It was the legend left by the great poet that especially won a response from Chris's imagination. Here was *his* master. The spirit of the dead boy rose like a flame before him. His approach to life was the true approach, his splendid daring, his passionate loyalty to the senses, the careless fatality of his romantic days. He it was who had left behind him the true hint, and not Archbishop Parker. Life was

a series of sensations devoid of ulterior significance and should never be regarded as anything else. All troubles came from not recognizing this, from not frankly acknowledging the simple fact that there was no immortality. It did not avail to dig oneself in, to restore one's valour with cobweb thoughts. A visit to any charnel-house should cure one of such fondness. There all the generations were gathered as though they were one and it mattered not whether the shrouds that were rotting to dust were wound about marrowbones fifty, a hundred, or two hundred years old. Here was the great mart of cancellation, the equilateral judgment hall where no judgments were given. For each midget of a man emptying with diurnal precision bladder and bowel there were certain hours of sight and hearing permitted, and then, late or soon, the hour of oblivion came. Death was the culmination of the miracle.

At night when he crossed the court to his room he would look up at the Milky Way stretched over the sky like a wreath of mist. The material Universe was bottomless, could not be measured. Yet when his small prying mind would fail, the miracle also would fail. All these chiselled stones gathered with such pains on the banks of the river, the buttery filled with stored wines, were an illusion. The grave Dons on the lookout for preferment, furiously building honeycombs of fallacious reasoning in order to cover up ugly gaps—they also were actually, “under the shadow of eternity,” accidental. Famine, fire, any national catastrophe, could show them up in a

trice. They were living half asleep in a fool's paradise of unreality. The little waste corner on the way to Botolph's lane where wormwood and nettles grew could better show the manners of nature. To forget the futility of life was to misunderstand life; was, in fact, to be betrayed. Examinations, care of the future, worldly success, these were not what really mattered. It was experience that alone counted, the capacity for experiencing with ever-increasing discrimination the few moments of allotted consciousness. He would look at the Dons and with amazement realize that there was not a single one of them but had allowed himself to be gulled by the surface values of existence. They talked of religion, but never for a moment took pains to comprehend its meaning, except in so far as it helped to conserve the pretty stage upon which they paraded decked in hoods woven out of silk which itself had been spun by a process of dainty dealing out of the delicate texture of mulberry leaves.



EIGHT

CHRIS became popular in the College. In spite of the heretical thoughts that disturbed the complacency of his life, he was able with eager high spirits

to share in the interests of his friends, which were mainly concerned with cricket, football, and rowing. Arm in arm, in shining shoes, they would parade along the ancient streets, with hearts free and young heads held high. In the evening the old walls of the College would echo with the sound of their calls and laughter. Often they would have drinking-bouts, and Chris, whose stomach was always uncertain, would presently feel his way out onto the grass and be sick. Yet even on occasions such as this, with the mullioned windows moving unsteadily before his drunken eyes, he would be reminded of his secret knowledge. The stars would sway, the very earth would appear to be moving sideways from under him, and he would think to himself of the unwisdom of forgetting for a single moment the untrustworthy nature of an existence that, with such slight encouragement, could be made so to stagger. And yet he knew he had his life before him; he had, if chance favoured him, long years of exploration; and often on summer evenings, when the air of the streets would be fragrant with the scent of lilac, the voices of the young men calling to each other through the open windows would seem symbolic, as though they actually were messengers summoning him to come down and play in the gardens of the world. It was pleasant to eat and to drink, to sit at lighted tables with wine and fowl and fish at one's elbow, and to know that death was still far off. The look of the starched napkins, of the clear crystal glasses, of the crisp green parsley on the edge of white china, was

alone sufficient to reconcile him to such an opportunity. All the infinite variety of existence, as he saw it from day to day unfold itself—how was it possible to regard it with eyes sad and estranged—the avaricious bedmakers creeping into college every morning like upright alley cats, each carrying a little black bag; the sleek good-natured porter so baffling to despair; the ingratiating tradespeople; the old scholars with their grey heads packed with knowledge, the result of a lifetime's labour, destined so soon to be dissipated!

Chris used often to spend the evening in the rooms of a musician whose windows overlooked a disused graveyard, and when the lights were burning clearest, and drinking was at its highest, he would spy through the blind at the tombstones collected there out of the past, and once more begin to number his days. How vast a difference there was between dead dust and live dust! There was no other secret of any consequence to be learnt, and from his place under the hanging curtain would suddenly come the sound of a flute. "Apples be ripe and nuts be brown," he would play seated in his shadowed corner midway between the lighted wine room and the upright churchyard stones.

At another time he would enter the College late at night a little tipsy, and with a dense inconsideration for the sleep of the more diligent undergraduates, begin singing the *Te Deum* at the top of his voice. "We praise thee, O God! We acknowledge thee to be the Lord." And his friends, hearing him,

would hurry out and bring him into their rooms and laugh and make much of him. All the while concurrently with this surface life his own inner life flowed forward, hardening itself with grave, almost puritanical purpose.

This mood of his received strength from a certain friendship he made. In a college overlooking the river he met one night Raymond Tytheridge. This young man was beautiful. He had long auburn hair that fell over a wide forehead, and dark eyes that took to themselves something of the colour of his hair, eyes that in moments of passion seemed to smoulder. At twenty this youth had managed to free himself from all inhibitions. The ethical restraints that so perplex and torment others had never interfered with his free actions. It was from him Chris learnt the high value of retaining through life at every turn of events a completely emancipated attitude. Taboos and prejudices were barbarous. Every civilized person should be able to regard, without the taint of ethical bias, the most outrageous situations that it was possible to conceive. Indeed Chris came later to hold that every form of prejudiced rejection was a danger to the commonwealth, the genial happiness of which depended on individual sensitiveness rather than upon individual morality, which after all should always be but a matter of individual taste. Thinking, purged of preconceptions, philosophic thinking—only through its power would salvation come to the world. This was where science was of value. Human events should be judged with-

out emotion, but even that was not enough. The one thing really necessary was *imagination*; every incident should be illuminated by this God-like gift. But imagination could not work freely if tormented by the prejudices of a misguided inheritance, which itself had its origin not so much in tested wisdom as in an unconscious knowledge how best to preserve the cunning structures of a society which for generations had been built up on the basest instincts of mankind.

It was in the company of this friend of his, his most trusted friend, that he had the first experience with a woman. It was after the sudden death of Chris's father, and he had gone to stay with Raymond in a little seaside place on the south coast of England. Each morning they would walk together, sometimes inland, sometimes along the shore. One day on a secluded bank outside a small wood they came upon uncounted harebells dancing in the wind. Chris stood to look at them with delight. He was bewitched by the grace of each thin stem, holding on high with perfect equilibrium its small bell whose ringing must surely be audible, so he fancied, to the ants and snails and tiny beetles at market in the surrounding grass. There are only two really interesting subjects for men and women to talk about—love-making and death. The former that morning had occupied the attention of the two boys. Raymond looked at the harebells. "When I see something beautiful I want to ravish it," he said, and in a moment he had stretched himself out upon the

flowers. It was an incident that troubled his companion when, after they had smoked a cigarette, he looked round for a moment before leaving the place. Was there a danger in thus snatching at the immaculate in life, at the ineffable essence that was forever present and not present and perhaps, who knew, most present when furthest from one? Possibly after all it was best to ride through the years upon a religious white camel with an undulating rhythm in its gait.

That night as they approached the outskirts of the town they passed two girls coming out of a laundry. The one was small and fair with a bold merry eye, the other tall and dark. The two young men asked them to direct them on their way, but after they had been told still loitered by a garden gate, talking. They all arranged to meet again after dark at the farther end of the seaside beach where the tamarisks grew. Chris, as he sat half an hour later in the little room, eating his freshly cut bread and butter and a lightly boiled egg, was trembling with anticipation. The fair girl, whose name was Agnes, had as they had parted looked into his eyes with a long lingering significant stare that promised well for his adventure. That look, hot and shameless, now as he sipped his tea ravished him quite. A smell of blue water, of seaweed and seasand, came through the open window where a lace curtain kept gently brushing against a small table upon which a dusty fern had been placed. He had hardly patience enough to smoke. He longed for the sun to go down.

He went up to his small bedroom, which looked out upon an inclosed garden. A fruit tree grew in its centre, and on a seat under it an old man was sleeping. The last rays of the evening sun were slanting down upon a bed of Canterbury bells, and with the aged human figure unconscious there, a deep peace seemed to come up to the boy from the sheltered ground. He looked at the broken weather-stained tiles on a roof opposite and at a wash-clout that hung from a sill. "Perhaps," he thought, "when I see these objects again I shall have been initiated into the joy that for so long a time has been a torment to my thoughts." He washed his hands and brushed his hair. The little objects on his dressing-table were also articulate of his suspense.

The girls were waiting at the appointed place. Chris, too shy even to speak, wandered away with Agnes along the shore. To the left the white cliffs raised their shining sides against the night sky. With a slow serpentine movement big waves crept up and down along the shingle. He dared at last to touch her hand. The girl with a laugh took his into hers. It felt to him a little rough and moist.

"You love me, don't you, darling?" she whispered.

"I do, I do," he answered, and his words were not false. They sat down under the shadow of a rock. Slowly they drew together. The girl tossed her hat aside and lay with her face unprotected under the stars. Her body was enervated, relaxed. Chris forgot everything, drugged by desire, by a burning desire.



NINE



THE question may very well be asked why it was that Chris, when he left the University, elected to become a schoolmaster. The profession presented itself as the easiest way of making a living. The holidays of a schoolmaster are long ones, and the prospect of teaching did not seem as depressing as work in a business office. He was offered a post as history master in a large private school at Eastbourne.

To reconcile his own individual mood with the set principles of this well-regulated establishment was from the first no easy matter. The headmaster, Mr. Hinny, was a clergyman, the son of a well-known Dean, and on Sundays this discreet gentleman would be occupied in superintending the school chapel, which was fitted with small neat hassocks and new rush-bottomed chairs. Chris used to listen to his decorous discourses, used to listen to the singing of the hymns by the small tidy pupils, with critical detachment. How far removed it all seemed from life as he saw it, as far removed as were the rushes on the chairs from the cool stretches of the forget-me-not river from which they had been gathered! He felt that these people were outside the current of truth, that they deliberately turned their minds from everything that underlay the

surface of the existence in which they were nourished. The foolish headmaster had a son born to him a few days after the beginning of the term. His comment upon the event was that he hoped the boy would get into the Harrow eleven. The thirty or forty children under his charge, with bright eyes and eager minds, were being deliberately taught to accommodate their natures to this man's artificial world. Never was an ugly word of verity dropped in those classrooms. Spiritual complacence held empire there. The sweated labour of the deluded workers out of which this fashionable seminary derived its sustenance was not so much as mentioned. The swift subversive utterances of Jesus were smoothed over, the dogmas of the Church taken for granted. These children ate their slices of beef with peas and potatoes and were never so much as aware that they were carnivorous and that the brown flesh on their plates was taken from the fallen body of an ox which in a cleverly designed slaughter-house had been dragged to its death with shouts and oaths. At every chance these instructors of children ran to cover. They made a perfect art of not using their minds, of hedging about with pretence their sentimental, meaningless lives. Their mouths were choked with idealistic speeches. Anything in life that projected, that shivered with a hidden electricity, was covered up with swift diligence. All their pains were directed towards preserving the façade of society as they had known it. Something puritanical in Chris's nature resisted the subtle im-

portunacy of his new environment. As he sat sipping the tea of these strangers he felt stir within him a deep distaste. He knew himself to be their enemy—a rebel. In the evenings he would walk along the well-ordered paths of the garden and curse his surroundings. The great globe-headed peonies, the ripening strawberries under expensive well-woven nets, brought him no respite. The very blackbirds that rose with a scream from under the gooseberry bushes seemed to him, with their plump and glossy bodies, to belong to a debased and domesticated breed. It was only when he passed through a small gate into a narrow paddock that he felt peace. This shadowed unvisited field, with a rubbish heap in the corner, alone seemed to give him the hope, nay, the certain assurance that the pretty, seemly school atmosphere, for all its illusion of established sovereignty, was actually beset by the docks and thistles and wormwood of the unregenerate planet.

Sometimes he would have an afternoon off and with a light heart would set out down to the shore. The vulgar stir of the sands would act like a tonic upon him. The crowded stretches under the hot sun gladdened his eyes. He liked to look at the recumbent bodies of men and women, the heels of their black boots kicking holes in the golden dust. He liked to look at the sun-tanned vendors marching up and down with cunning untrustworthy faces, at the children coming up out of the glimmering shallow water at the sea's margin with the strident egoism of their personalities uncorrected, and more than

all he liked to look at the young girls who, with swift glances, angled for attention. There was at least nothing dull about these long, gleaming level flats. Here it was possible actually to witness human life pushing its way forward, rude, self-interested, and wilful. There was nothing hypocritical about these crowds. If they were thirsty they drank, gulping down the liquid like animals; when they were hungry they munched at their food, at their bananas and buns, and when lust awakened in them their eyes, with a slow treacherous concentration, settled upon the graceful curves of nakedness which the youth of that motley congregation so carelessly everywhere exposed.

One evening when he entered the small orchard he found he was not alone. The headmaster's niece, Adela Manners, was seated under the privet hedge reading. At first he felt inclined to retire, but then remembering certain light glances that had passed between them over the dining-room table he lingered, trying to devise how best he could engage her attention. She was pretty, with large blue eyes and a head of richly grown yellow hair. Presently she put her book down on her lap and looked up. Chris advanced towards her. The evening air, now that the sun was hidden behind the sycamores that bordered the road on the other side of the wall, was cool and refreshing. It seemed as if it were burdened with the breath of numberless coloured petals, of numberless green leaves. "How lovely it is here," he said. "It is my favourite place in all the garden."

"I have often seen you come here from my window," she answered simply.

"What else can you see from your window?" he asked with a hint of adventurous intimacy.

"I can see the Avenue," she said.

"It is a shady Avenue," Chris responded, "but I don't like it particularly."

"Why not?" she questioned.

"I don't know, I never see anybody on it that interests me. It seems only to be used by tradespeople leaving their goods at the back doors of houses that look all of them just the same."

The girl laughed an uncertain nervous laugh and with her left hand gave her frock a slight pull so as the better to hide her knees. "She thinks the same thoughts as other girls although she is the niece of that terrible man," Chris reflected. The conversation now seemed to hesitate. The girl with one of her fingers was directing the passage of a money spider across her sleeve. Chris picked a privet flower, and pressing its pyramidical cluster of pure white blossoms between his fingers, offered it her to smell. "This flower," he said, "has a very heavy and peculiar scent, don't you think? It is the whitest of all flowers, and yet as soon as it fades it turns a rusty red colour."

Their tentative overtures were now suddenly interrupted by the appearance of the headmaster, who was seen carefully lifting the latch of the small gate. When he observed the young people he gave a discreet apologetic cough. He was not at all displeased

at finding the two together. He remained by them for a few moments, resting upon a stick the handle of which opened out into a small seat. He laughed and talked for a little, his well-shaved clerical features having upon them a simpering, ingratiating expression. The girl presently rose, and saying good night to Chris, went off, with the shawl she had been sitting upon under her arm. The two men followed her, walking slowly down the garden path. Chris looked at the neat rounded asparagus beds and then at the neat narrow neck of his urbane employer.



As THE days went by the friendship between Chris and Adela strengthened. The girl was restless. It was not that she felt any great restraint of spirit in her uncle's house. The interests and life of the school were not out of harmony with her own tastes. The life around her was the life she knew. There was, however, one thing lacking in her days. She longed to be loved, to marry. When she thought of the future at all it was always with the prospect of becoming the mistress of a house which she would be able to manage as she wished. For the present she filled up her time with tennis parties and dinner

engagements, content if she could wear pretty frocks and meet people before whom she could display her gift of easy laughing chatter. She was a nice girl, and any one who saw her lean her bicycle against the ivied wall outside the school and enter its doors with light step would have wished her well, saying to himself, "There goes a pretty girl." She was attracted by Chris, but a little frightened by him. He would appear to her often overserious. She would approach him equipped with a merry fire of frivolous sentences, but he would discount her sallies and inject into the conversation some unexpected thought, like a word out of a confessional. One morning, before the bell rang for luncheon, they stood watching the goldfish swimming to and fro in the basin of a fountain that was before the house. "That one there with a gold tail—see how vain it is, trying to display its scales in the sun. It just wants to show off. Let me throw a pebble at it," and she stooped to pick up a small stone from the gravel.

"It's only doing what we all do," Chris said. "The impulses that propel these goldfish are the same as those that propel us. We also want to show off, and we also want to eat *all* the crumbs."

"Do you really think so?" she answered uncertainly.

"Of course I do. Why, if your soul could be plucked out of your beautiful body and slipped into that fish's mouth, and its soul, all silver yellow, given to you, nobody would be able to tell the difference. When you got out of bed in the early morn-

ing and when you met your uncle at the breakfast table and tripped across to the sideboard to get a sausage out of the hot silver bowl, you would be exactly as you are now, look the same and speak the same and yet all the time have the soul of a goldfish."

"I don't believe a word you say," she laughed, stretching out her pretty instep against the precise coping-stone. "You are far too misanthropic."

They were standing close together, their eyes upon the gardener Roberts, who was moving across the lawn with a box of calceolaria. Chris held his hand in such a way that it touched the girl's thigh, so gracefully covered by her light summer frock. They remained standing still. The boy was presently conscious of a slight shiver passing through his companion's body, a tremulous shiver, like the shiver of the gauze wings of a dragon fly when it first feels the sun. In that suspended moment, with the sound of children's voices coming to him through the garden trees, he was conscious of a deep satisfaction, for he knew that her response to the tentative contact proved beyond all dispute that he and she had, if only for a fraction of a second, stepped out of their depressing surroundings. As if by magic the empty intercourse that ruled this well-appointed house fell away. Gone were the new ink-stained forms, vanished the protective deceptions. Together they had entered a charmed circle that was outside time. They were under the shadow of Merlin's tree. Helen of Troy had been betrayed thus. Even in the

purlieus of private schools the crust of the commonplace was breakable. Here was an absolute assurance that only a little way beneath the surface of the appearance of things there was release, freedom, poetry!

"Tomorrow is a half holiday. Will you come for a walk with me? Perhaps we could meet at the end of Sycamore Avenue."

The girl turned her head and looked at him with her blue eyes. "Yes, I will come," she said.

The afternoon was cloudless when Chris found himself waiting for her. Minutes passed, and still there was no sign of her appearance. He looked down the road splashed with sunlight, and still he did not see her figure. He went over to a wall and sat down amongst some long grasses that had found sufficient nourishment out of the narrow crevice of earth remaining still at the back of the pavement. He waited. Very excited, he tried to imagine exactly how she would look when she did come round the corner and advance towards him over these pools of light. When he saw her at last, he rose to his feet and in his animation forgot everything. She wore the same blue frock, but her face was shaded with a wide-brimmed straw hat. They walked together to the tramway and bought tickets to the farther end of the town. Chris had promised to take her to see a certain underground grotto that had been recently discovered. When at last they entered the place they found it consisted of a number of passages, the walls of which were decorated with a kind of mosaic of oyster shells.

In the dim-lighted catacomb Chris dared to hold the girl's hand. She did not draw it away. He could feel how soft was the texture of her long fingers, and as they moved through the windless corridors he became aware of an unscented fragrance of her skin, sweet as the hide of a young calf, and yet having also in it a certain human quality different from that of any animal. Perhaps in far-off years, before the human sense of smell had been atrophied, a man would search out his love in dense jungles by no other means than this, just as today little foxes find each other on spring nights.

Once out in the street again, Chris hesitated as to what they should do, eventually deciding to get out of the town and walk along the downs. He felt increasingly attracted by the girl, but at the same time withdrawn from her. They spent the afternoon in a little dell near some gorse-bushes. It was here Chris kissed her for the first time. Now that they were alone she seemed cold. He tried to take her into his arms, but she drew herself away. "I don't think you have any right to behave like this, Mr. Holbech," she said, and those few words, with their acquiescence in the codes of her upbringing, chilled him. They seemed to demand that his approaches should follow the recognized sequence marked out by the conventional world. "Good God! Is it necessary for me to ask her in marriage before I can make love to her?" And the mere thought that he might be caught and be made a prisoner in one of these villas

in the Avenue filled him with alarm. The afternoon sun shone gently down upon the bank on which they were resting. It seemed utter madness that they should not be happy in so secret and agreeable a retreat. A patch of thyme grew near where they were lying. It was like a pool of spilt wine. He pulled up a piece of it. It smelt of the earth. "Come, Adela, let me play," he pleaded.

"But you don't really love me," she said. "That is what makes me so sad."



ELEVEN



ADELA MANNERS, when she reached home, was in doubt how to regard her afternoon's excursion. For half an hour she lay on her bed thinking. Now that she was alone and surrounded by the familiar objects of her room, she began almost to wish that she had been more responsive. "I don't suppose he meant any real harm," she thought, "and then if he had wished to be immoral, if he really loved me, perhaps it would not have so much mattered." This last reflection made her restless. She caught a glimpse of herself in the mirror of her half-open wardrobe door in an attitude of consent. She blushed and made a gesture of straightening her frock. It

would be interesting to be properly married, but very terrifying. If he came in now and proposed to her she would not be too strict with him. Then suddenly a feeling of tenderness for Chris took possession of her. After all it was he and not any of the other masters who had appreciated her. She remembered now the concern he had shown as he directed her through the streets and the very look of troubled disappointment that had appeared upon his face when she had repulsed him. He certainly was "sweet." She did love him. Her one anxiety was now lest he might have been disillusioned. "Perhaps my conversation was silly and he has grown tired of being with me already."

She found her uncle in a very affable mood when she sat down to dinner. He had come in from showing some prospective parents round the buildings. "They were nice enough people," he remarked, "but not perhaps quite, quite—quite." He helped himself to a lamb chop, carefully detaching with his knife and fork the little round morsel of tender meat from the fat and bone. "I wonder whether Roberts has rolled the first eleven pitch this evening. It ought to be in pretty good condition for tomorrow. I think the boys are shaping quite well."

Though his wife appeared to be listening to his words it was evident that her thoughts were far away. "Oh, Hughy," she said at last, "you can't imagine what a darling the little babe was this evening when I left the nursery. He held his arms up

and actually waved them at me as I was going out of the door."

Adela was glad when she had finished her plate of raspberries and cream and was able to escape. She snatched up a wrap from one of the hall chairs and darted away under the trees in the direction of the orchard. But when she opened the little gate the inclosure was empty, except for the old white horse which was kept to pull the mowing-machine on the school playing-fields. She walked impatiently across to a dilapidated shed which stood by the opposite wall. She would have liked to see Chris once more that day, to have given him one look to show how much she really cared for him. She knew if she stayed out long her uncle and aunt would be coming to look for her. They liked her to be with them after dinner. The headmaster enjoyed hearing a little music when he was taking his coffee. She must leave behind some token to tell of her having been there, some token that Chris would know came from her. She picked six blossoms from the privet hedge and carefully arranged them along the latch of the little gate—slipping their stalks between the iron and the wood.

Chris's own response to his afternoon had not been dissimilar. He returned in doubt as to his feelings, and then as he sat at his desk with a roomful of silent boys occupied in the preparation of work for the next day he was surprised by a wave of romantic retrospection. The dreary sound of feet shuffling unconsciously under the forms set him

thinking. She certainly had been a refreshing companion. He remembered how spontaneously she had stroked his hand when he had held the thyme up to her. He was astonished by the sweet pleasure that suffused his body when he thought of her. It was as though the essence of her personality, tardy in its influence at first, had now like some rich wine brought life to his veins.

After his supper he went as usual to the field. He arrived there only a few minutes after the girl had left. He saw the privet blossoms and held them in his hands. They must have been put there by Adela. He recalled his first conversation with her. And how sweet the flowers smelt, and how white they were! Her own breasts could hardly be whiter. These flowers, balanced so carefully on the green-painted iron latch of the paddock gate, more than anything she could have done, intrigued him. It delighted him that she should have thought of selecting such pretty messengers and of setting them to wait for him just like this. The attraction he felt for the girl, which if the truth could have been known, had its origin in his lust, from that evening became falsified by a deceptive process of idealization. It is an ancient sequence that few lovers can escape. Led forward by a tyrannous urge, the mind exerts itself to find good reason for the hectic stir of its brother the body. My sweet Lady, my sweet chuck, she is the best this and the best that! She is different from all others, more sensitive, unmatched, not to be paralleled. Had any one ever a lighter step, a more

intelligent mind, a more sensitive intuition? She looks and behaves like a Queen's daughter. Ah! my dear, my darling, my brown hare of the fields! The desire for a girl's body is a very different thing from the appreciation of her mind or personality. Chris, for all his cynicism and advanced thinking, was an incorrigible romantic, and as the end of the summer term drew near he felt more and more as if this little school miss was to be his destined mate. The mere fact that she loved him seemed to set her apart from all the world, a being incomparable, never to be replaced.



TWELVE



IT WAS in the same gorse-bush dell that Chris six weeks afterwards uttered the perilous words, "Will you marry me?" They had approached the place by a different way through grassy lanes and across a village green. The hot dog-day's sun had beaten down upon their shoulders, and they had felt nothing but happiness. The glimpses of unspoilt rural life that they had seen had put Chris into a mood of deep content. It was at the time of the year when the wayside grass, which a few weeks before had fallen deep and green and uncropped over the roads, had taken on a dusty, used appearance. The hedge

parsley had given place to tall thick-stalked hog-weeds, and near each gate grew patches of fleabane, its small yellow buds just beginning to show. Chris, under the influence of these harmonious summer sights, had won back his old acquiescent mood, his old power of sinking himself away out of the everyday life. They stood to look at a potato patch, and it was as though he himself shared the thoughtless industry of the bees that clustered about the entrances of some hives which had been placed in a row under the garden hedge opposite. They watched a horse drinking at a farmyard trough, and while they observed the animal's satisfaction as the water passed down its neck Chris felt the sensual reward of that physical unreflective obedience. Indeed, all he looked upon on that afternoon of flies and dusty heat consoled his spirit—the very poultry in the farmyards collecting under the shadowed carts or scratching with insistent impatience on the dry dung and litter. And all that he saw, whether it was a child in a white pinafore coming down a corn field path, or an old woman shelling broad beans in the doorway of her kitchen, he was able, by some pretty mental chicanery, to identify with the girl at his side. It was her presence, the lift of her feet before him, the swaying of her slender hips, the charming way her hair was drawn across her temples, that seemed to have restored to him his old state of receptivity. Surely with such a companion, all his days would be filled with happiness. Adela herself was enjoying the walk, but her enjoyment was derived

chiefly from the fact that she knew she had managed to capture and concentrate upon herself the interest of the young man whose affection had lately become so important to her. Actually this was not the kind of expedition that appealed to her. She would stand looking over valerian-covered walls at this or that village spectacle and feel a kind of secret sense of superiority, as though the eagerness of her companion, his excitement at viewing such unexciting scenes, revealed a nature almost infantile in its inexperienced simplicity. It seemed like a new world to her, but a world whose values were almost too easy to learn.

“Do you know what the other name of valerian is?” he asked her, scrambling up the bank to where she stood. “It is called in the villages ‘kiss me quick.’ Isn’t that delightful, and doesn’t it suggest the endless summer evenings that have passed here in England, with girls and boys, generation after generation, playing and laughing and love-making over just such walls as these? And now it is our hour. Even in this village thousands of dead lovers are gathered in the churchyard. Their day is past, they are deaf to the shrill shrieking of the bats, blind to the flight of the swallows diving under the eaves of houses once so familiar to them. And thousands are waiting to be born, thousands upon thousands, who will be thrilled as we are now thrilled, who will find life, unsubject and unscrupulous, stir within them.”

Adela liked to hear Chris talk, but at the same time she felt a mental resistance to much of what

he said. She was constantly conscious of harbouring reservations in her own secret mind. For instance, it was surely wilful of him to keep on using the word "oblivion." She believed in immortality. It would be incredible if her uncle was wrong and all the rest of the clergy. Of course there might not be a heaven and hell in the old-fashioned sense, but it was sheer silliness to pretend that there was not some kind of after-life. "Though if we do marry," she thought, "I don't think I would find him difficult. He is still very young. I think we would settle down and be happy. I would have our maid bring tea up to our room every morning." This trifling domestic resolution had the effect of evoking in her mind the very look of their future bedroom. She could see the servant in her crisp starched cap occupied with emptying the water of the night before and replacing the china basins on the washstand, each with its accompanying can of hot water covered with neat cosies. She could see her ivory-backed brush and comb and little hand mirror that had belonged to her mother arranged on the dressing-table, could see herself sitting before them and Chris coming over to give her a kiss. "He has never had any one to look after him properly, the poor darling," she thought.

Chris meanwhile, walking behind her, was thinking, "She is a pretty girl. I certainly feel bewitched by her. I wonder if what I feel is real love. I should certainly delight in undressing her. How strong and shapely her body must look when she is naked, absolutely naked. She will never let me have her unless

I marry her. But, Good Lord! think of being connected with that awful chap, Hugh Hinny. Heaven forbid! But after all there is no real reason why I should not marry. I have £150 a year over and above what I earn as a schoolmaster. The selection of any one as a wife is hazardous, and she has certain obvious virtues. If one doesn't marry one is always faced by the old dilemma. If a girl's virtue is easy you are in danger of the pox, you can always be sure of that, and if she is virtuous, then there is the risk of getting her with child." His mind remained undecided. It was only when they lay side by side in their retreat that the idea of asking the girl to marry him kept recurring, with ever greater insistence. But he even then might have remained silent had he not noticed suddenly as she held her head up to be kissed that her eyes were full of tears. At the realization of the emotion she was experiencing he felt a gust of love, tender and protective, sweep across him. She loved him. These tears were for him. It was as though the very inner sanctuary of his egoism had received upon its hard surface gentle drops of holy water.



THIRTEEN



CHRIS insisted upon their being married at once, and it was arranged that the wedding should take place at the beginning of September. He had an interview with Adela's uncle that very evening when they got back. He found Mr. Hinny in his study, sitting in his armchair with a heap of examination papers on a table by his side. It was evident that he received Chris's announcement with genuine satisfaction. "Well, Holbech, I hope you will have a very happy married life," he said at last, laying his hand on Chris's shoulder. His manner throughout the conversation had shown great solicitude. Sometimes it appeared almost jocular, as if he were an official participant in some kind of enviable indulgence, and sometimes his clerical physiognomy would resolve itself into an expression of devout sentimentality as he uttered his grave platitudes. It was as though his words were the inevitable product of the school he had built, prompted by the little electric bell at his front door, suggested by the evenly arranged tiles in his hall. His thoughts, however, remained free: "It would be a good thing to get this girl off my hands," he thought. "Ever since my brother died she has been an expense and a responsibility to me. This young man will do very well. He is rather erratic, but the responsibilities of marriage will steady him

no doubt. I wonder how Adela will behave when he first gets into bed with her." The last speculation shot in and out of his mind with guilty rapidity, as though aware that its appearance could not hope to receive much sanction. "For my own part," he continued aloud, "I need not, I am sure, tell you what a very real pleasure it is to think that you will soon be one of the family." He here gave a little cough. "I have always felt a great liking for you, Christopher, if I may be allowed now to call you by that name. I know that there are certain important matters upon which our views differ. But it takes, as they say, many minds to make a world. You are a gentleman, and I feel confident you will always treat this young girl, whose welfare and happiness are about to be entrusted to you, with loving care. You will find," and a sigh now issued from his lips, "that there will arise small differences, small disagreements, between you. This must of necessity be so with two young people living so intimately together. But," and now his voice took on a more cheerful tone, "with a little forbearance, a little mutual effort to meet each other's wishes, you will find that all will go happily. You have, if I may say so, won a very good and a very pure girl for a wife, and I trust she will be to you a real help in your life's work. I feel I ought to tell you, perhaps," and now the practical man of the world was talking, the Rev. Hugh Hinny who at the beginning of each term, in a silk-lined clerical hat, stood on the London platform ushering his pupils into the carriage

reserved for their use, "that Adela was left by her parents quite unprovided for. I have always intended to do what it was in my power to do for her in the case of her marrying, and I shall arrange to give her an allowance of £100 a year. This is not much, I know, but with my other responsibilities I do not feel I would be justified in making it more just now. You, I understand, have a small income of your own, and that with your salary should be sufficient for your requirements for the time being. When children begin to come," and he looked up at Chris with an expression of cheery encouragement, "we will see what more we can do. Sufficient unto the day are the blessings thereof," and with a genial handshake and renewed congratulations, he showed Chris to the door, closing it with discreet deliberation behind his departing back.

In the passage leading to his room Chris found three small boys busily employed in changing the food of the caterpillars they were keeping. They were replacing the crisp old, dried-up, sapless leaves with fresh ones. A curious smell rose from the tin biscuit boxes, a little sour but not unpleasant. "Oh, sir, look at these two fighting," one little ruffian with red hair, Johnson minor, cried, and Chris stood over him and watched the obscure contest that was taking place. The boy was holding a long dry cock's-foot grass in his hand. He had put a caterpillar at each end of it and had encouraged them to advance towards a meeting-place in its centre. The many-legged monsters, with the latent power of incredible

transformation in their hideous wormlike bodies, as soon as they met on the narrow bridge began fighting to the death. They raised their saurian heads, and clinging to each other, waved to and fro in unreasonable fury. "Aren't they in a wax?" the boy exclaimed in surprised delight. Fresh from the interview and with his experiences of the day unassimilated, Chris's mind found this odd, intimate glimpse into caterpillar life stimulating. He contemplated the expenditure of all this combative energy with amazement. It was utterly futile. The two creatures could have passed on the grass with no hurt to either. But here they were blindly struggling, struggling with all the spirit of infuriated dragons, *about nothing*. And yet were human beings any wiser? Everywhere he looked, figuratively speaking, people were taking each other by the throat, and to as little purpose. Caterpillar souls with a hundred secret desires smiling and stabbing, stabbing and smiling!

When he reached his room he saw the book in which he kept the marks of the form lying on the table. It was wide open as he had left it before going out, the names of the boys registered in neat order behind a red line down the margin. A heavy depression gathered about him. Surely he had made a fine day's work of it. As a galled mule will lower her withers before ever the saddle has been settled upon her back, so he now felt in anticipation the infinite weariness and ennui of the future. He had never intended to be a schoolmaster all his life, he had certainly never intended to be a married school-

master. He was caught. He had put up his nose and a brass ring had been fitted upon it. Already he could hear his prospective uncle lightly mentioning the pleasant piece of news to the other masters. He had been a fool. He had sold his freedom—for what? But then all at once he thought of the girl lying back under the gorse-bushes all soft and sensitive and with tears in her eyes. Surely there could be no grave danger in committing one's happiness to the care of anybody so young and so gentle.



FOURTEEN



ON THE evening of the wedding day Chris and Adela arrived at a small inn at Abbotsbury in the county of Dorset. It was a profound relief to Chris to have put so many miles between him and the scene of the recent ceremony. Here, at last, he hoped that the too vivid memories of those false, shallow, society hours would fall from them. With deep distaste he remembered them, the clothes he had been forced to wear, and the attitude of high-spirited affability that it had been necessary for him to assume. With wry discomfort he saw himself and his bride entering the well-appointed new church, saw the crowded pews filled with inquisitive women,

the little wooden notice board behind the pulpit with the selected hymn duly recorded upon it by means of figures slipped into the place by the precise, trembling thumb of the virgin organist. The intermingling of religious solemnity with the desire he felt for Adela had seemed to him vulgarly incongruous. He felt like a ninny in subjection, a ninny dressed up to play the part of a conforming fashion-plate. He loved this girl, wanted to possess her, and to perform this simple purpose it was necessary for him to play so ignominious a rôle, to be the centre of interest for selfish, ostentatious people whose chief concern was with the outward form of this custom.

When the final blessing had been given, Chris had glanced back at the hundreds of fantastic head-dresses all nodding in prayer and had known for certain that not a single one of these women felt any genuine concern as to his future. They were, indeed, a regimented section of that appalling social vanguard—heartless, merciless, frivolous, and vain—that chokes imagination and contaminates the clear-flowing stream of human existence. To have listened to the talk that issued from their mouths from the moment that they lifted their heads from their pillows would have been a devastating revelation as to the possibilities of the futility of the human mind. And it was this ceremony and the stress laid upon it which more than anything else gave strength to these people's detestable delusions. It was the rigidity of this paper custom which made

it possible for them to keep, with the help of the golf course and the club, their dissatisfied husbands safe at their sides. He thought of the talk he had listened to at endless dinner tables, talk devoid of interest, unenlightened, transitory, a mere chuck, chuck, chuck to be forgotten the next evening. He thought of their card tables, of their other senseless activities; and here they were collected to watch the trap-door snap to upon another simpleton, another prisoner, who might be restless at first, but who would soon "settle down"—and this new recruit was none other than himself!

Just before they had left for the station they had entered the reception room in order to say good-bye to the more favoured guests. The large school dining-room had been transformed. Red carpets covered that wide floor which the charwoman, Mrs. Jones, used to scrub so diligently every Saturday afternoon when the boys were in the playing-field. Tables laden with provisions stood along one wall, and behind the tables two hired men servants were busy opening champagne bottles, napkins over their forearms. They drew the corks superbly with their left hands, leaving their right hands free for the pouring of the sparkling liquor into wide-mouthed glasses. As Chris and Adela came down the passage past the door of his own form room, now deserted, they had heard the murmur of the assembly growing louder and louder—that extraordinary murmur that resembles the murmur of birds. "Your wedding was the prettiest wedding I have ever attended, Mr.

Holbech, if you will permit me to say so," lisped stout Mrs. Capel-Taylor. "Adela looked too, too sweet, and you did not appear to be at all nervous. I suppose you are now all agog to be off and leave us to our monotonous rounds, while you enjoy your 'three weeks.' Was not there a book called *Three Weeks?*" And she smiled a smile of false sophistication. "You are such a reader you surely must know it. You are going to Dorset, I understand. Every one goes to Dorset nowadays. I suppose it's because . . ."

Her conversation was interrupted by a hand on his sleeve, and he was presented to a young woman with an enormous hat decorated with artificial red poppies. "I have so enjoyed being at your wedding," she said. "Weddings are lots of fun, only I always want to eat *all* the cake. There is never enough almond paste, though. Tell me why are bakers so mean about their almond paste. I want to eat the cake and marry the bridegroom, especially when he is handsome. How is it one never has a bridegroom as good-looking as other people do?" She laughed and at the same time dropped a lascivious little curtsy.

At that moment he noticed a white rose, large and beautiful, with petals unbroken and uncrushed, lying near the sharp heel of another woman who, with a gracefully balanced coffee cup in her hand, was engaged in a conversation with a smart elderly man. He stooped to pick it up. He would deliver *it* out of its life in death anyhow. As he raised him-

self, his head touched the woman's elbow which had moved its position. The impact was slight, but it proved sufficient to topple the small cup over so that the coffee was splashed upon her very expensive gown. "Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" the woman exclaimed, deaf to Chris's apologies. "The gown is ruined, quite ruined." Her concern was now genuine. Indeed it was the first time that any real emotion had obtruded itself in the room. The elderly man hurried her to one of the tables, and Chris caught a glimpse of him a moment later stooping to sponge intermittently the woman's frock with a napkin dipped in hot water. How he hated trousers that had subdued lines running perpendicularly down them!



As soon as they had unpacked their few things they went downstairs to a supper of fresh eggs and freshly washed lettuce. They were both happy and in good spirits. As Chris dexterously knocked off the top of the shell of his first egg, he thought, "It was worth going through all that in order to live with this girl. I shall soon free her mind and get her to read and enjoy the same things that I do. At any rate she is lovely to be with. See how prettily she

is pouring out the tea. I am fortunate. I am happy." At the same time another voice, cynical and subversive, whispered, "You are not really happy. You know you are pretending. You know you don't love her without reservations. You only half love her. You have deceived yourself, you have made a mistake." To all of which an answer came back: "Even if I have made a mistake it is only a partial mistake. All life is made up of partial mistakes. I can by the smallest conscious effort compel myself to be happy with her."

And she, as she smiled across the table at him, and rearranged the muslin, with edges weighted with beads, over the white milk jug, thought, "I do hope he won't grow tired of me. I must try to follow his ideas. When I get home I shall begin to read more. After all I used to be head of the school at Tunbridge Wells, so I must have some brains. How kind to me he always is! I am lucky. I do hope I shall be a good wife. I hope they are getting on with the house at Eastbourne, I never had time to go round the last few days before the wedding. I wonder how the wallpaper in the drawing-room looked. Oh! I will make him a wonderful home. He deserves it. I wonder whether he will want to make 'real' love tonight. I feel nervous when I think of that. But anyhow I can ask him not to do it the very first night."

Chris glanced up at her with shining eyes. "How quiet it is," he said. "Listen, you can only hear those boys outside talking and the sheep on the downs.

After tea I vote we walk to St. Catherine's Chapel on the top of the hill. Darling Adela! It is such a joy to have you all to myself, away from everybody."

When Chris had finished his cigarette they rose from the table. They passed up the narrow stairs. An odour unmistakably English, of beer and tobacco, came to them from the bar. While Adela spoke for a moment to the landlady Chris caught a glimpse of an old man sitting in a collarless shirt, on a bare bench. Chris took in his contented attitude, his look of having reached a shelter, a harbour, and the few words about the state of the corn fields in which the man had been working, as they came to Chris, seemed to dispel his treacherous doubts. The little farm path which led from the inn to the foot of the hill upon which stood the chapel had been used by generations of pilgrims. Under the dusty couch-grass that had forced its way through the interstices of the stones, and that now muffled their treading, it was possible to see the broad paving-flags so long ago put into place. These stones, which had felt upon their surfaces the pointed footwear of mediaeval travellers, were now supporting the pit-pat of Adela as she advanced towards the gate opening into the field. Chris felt exultant at being allowed to play a part in the stored memories of so historical an acreage. His whole will-power became concentrated upon stealing from the years their honied romance. He had schooled himself to excel in this practice. Its success required that he

should escape from every appeal made by importunate modernity, that he should compel himself to view life philosophically, poetically; view it through a medium of heightened awareness by means of which he and Adela should no longer be a young schoolmaster and his bride, newly come from Eastbourne, but lovers, whose only distinction was that of being the latest man and woman to climb up the slippery sun-dried grass of the famous eminence.

He lifted the gate of the field to let Adela through and noticed with pleasure the athletic manner of her movements. Suddenly she paused. "I wonder," she said, "whether I had not better write to Hawk and Miller and ask them, after all, to put the larger of those two baths into the bathroom at The Trossachs. After all we may live in the house for years and years, and while we are having it done we may as well get the best tub we can."

These words, uttered just then, had the effect of sending a tiny shiver down Chris's spine, a shiver which immediately created a little pocket of depression at the bottom of his stomach. A faint shadow of reproach passed over his features as he answered, "Yes! I think you are right. We had better get the big bath put in; I always like baths to be very big."

As he followed her now he tried to analyse the reason of his momentary gloom. Was it because her words proved that her thoughts, her mood, were so remote from the adventure they were experiencing together, and which seemed to him just then to be

so all-important? Or was it the name of their home, The Trossachs, already obtruding itself in its own right, into the hours of his life, a name that had from the first struck him as absurd, but which now as it was uttered took to itself a novel significance. The Trossachs! It was in The Trossachs then that his years were waiting for him. Gradually his own secret unregenerate life would be lost there. He would become a model husband and a model school-master. "The stag at eve had drunk its fill"—drunk its fill in the largest possible "tub."

They had now reached the platform upon which the chapel stood. The beauty of the evening as the sun sank behind the hills of Devonshire melted his trouble. With eagerness his eyes took in the landscape and the wide blue stretches of the West Bay. There was the Island of Portland to the left, and before the sea, a number of meadows, between the darker hedgerows freshly green again, after the June haymaking. How peaceful it was! He could look down upon groups of cows with lowered heads moving slowly about below. Their attitude of grave acquiescence seemed to restore him. "What a wonderful view!" Adela exclaimed, putting her hand upon his wrist. "Oh! I am so happy."

The chapel was built of solid stone; the very roof had been rendered water-tight by massive stone blocks firmly fitted together. They found a place to sit between two broad buttresses. "Why did they build the chapel on the top of this hill?" she asked.

"I suppose they wanted some exercise to keep themselves fit," she laughed.

"It was especially useful in bad weather," Chris answered. "They used to burn flares on the top of the tower, which on dark nights were visible to men in fishing-boats from far out at sea. Girls would come up here to pray to St. Catherine for their sailor lovers."

"Do you think they were as fond of them as I am of you?" she said artlessly. Chris turned to her and pulled her back against the cold stone, kissing her on the lips. He laid his right hand on the white skin above her stocking. It felt to him soft and firm, like the texture of some beautiful cool mushroom that had been shaded by grass all through a long summer day. He kissed her again and again, but when under the sway of his rising desire his overtures became more exacting Adela drew away. "Why do you always want to be horrid?" she said.



SIXTEEN



As CHRIS lay in bed that night he had much to think about. From his pillow he could see the branch of an elm tree against the sky. The limb of timber remained motionless; the midnight air was so still that

not one of its small crinkled leaves rustled. Outside the village the surrounding downs were silent. Except for a daddy-long-legs that was beating itself against the side of the window that he had found was not made to open, and the rhythmical snoring of a man across the narrow carpeted passage, there was nothing to disturb the hush of the interior of the thatched tavern. The hoarse breathing of the man rose and fell, rose and fell, at perfectly regular intervals. How curious it was that people should snore! Did monkeys snore, he wondered, as they swayed in their tree tops? Surely this sound that had its origin in slumber must be peculiar to man. Shakespeare had noticed how men snored, had probably lain awake many a night at Stratford or in old Elizabethan London houses listening to such heavy reverberations. Now, as then, everywhere, all over England, dim interiors under roofs echoed with the extraordinary noise. Outside were owls and bats and fluttering insects, while within, under the kitchen table, cockroaches were engaged upon their quest for food, circumnavigating dirty or dusty boots, creeping under pans, exploring darkened recesses. What a life it was—this that took place when old and young lay thus bewitched! It was then that mangy leather-tailed rats eyed each other and that mice in the wainscots copulated.

That unpleasant word, suddenly projected into his mind, had the effect of once more turning his meditations upon the very subject that had prevented him from closing his eyes. He knew by her

quiet breathing that Adela had been asleep for a long time. It was charming to have a young girl sleeping peacefully at one's side. He knew that she had sacrificed herself that evening to his will. "Out of a sense of duty," he thought with a twist of his mouth. Well, it was something that she had been indulgent at all. Perhaps as time went on the quality of their embraces would improve. What did society and modern education do to girls to subvert their natures at this rate? This intimate relationship, to which he had looked forward with such eagerness, had after his recent experience lost all value in his sight. He was not one to enjoy raping a girl, and yet that evening he had been the chief actor in what amounted almost to a rape—a rape tacitly acquiesced in by its frightened victim, but a rape all the same. If she had displayed the slightest indication of enjoyment, of sensual participation, he would not have felt so disappointed. It had been evident that any elaboration of their play was distasteful to her. She liked to have him kiss her on the forehead and lips, but as for anything else! The most innocent explorations obviously offended her. They seemed to her humiliating. The most exquisite privileges of love-making were subjected to a petty prejudiced Sunday School appraisal.

Suddenly, out of the night beyond the heavy overshadowing bough came the jinnee shriek of a hooting owl. The cry that came out of the irreligious bird's head seemed to punctuate his thought. He could see it resting in the cool shadows of the

meadow trees, the claws with which it clutched the branches leaving upon the bark the tiny grey hairs of its latest victim. How he hated any kind of idealism, anything that was divorced from nature with its natural passions! The nanny goat defended its kid, the cob swan was faithful to its mate, and out of such spontaneous altruism, such selected fidelity, had been constructed a veritable edifice of windy words. And this sentimental western idealism was always in its final hidden analysis associated with some secret baser proposal: in the case of sexual chastity, with the preparation of maidens for the marriage market. They must be presented untouched, unsullied, grapes fresh from a vineyard. And these deprived and limited school-mistresses achieved their intention to such purpose that their pupils were actually ruined for life. Still Adela slept. It was absurd and selfish of him to be so put out. Of course it was an ordeal for any girl brought up as she had been brought up. The cultivation of one's own peculiar gift for responding to sensual pleasures required as much training as the cultivation of the mind. After all she had not actually repulsed him. To dislike embraces was a different thing from refusing to be embraced.

He got up and went to the window. The night air refreshed him like a draught of water drawn from the bottom of a moss-green well; the air was heavy with summer odours. It was as though some mighty God with one of his striding feet on the chapel hill had just then, in his eastern march, taken

between his finger and thumb the herbage of the western county, and pressing it together—grass, corn, rushes, leaves, and flowers—had for a moment held the knot to his nostrils inhaling its essence. Chris once more felt happy. "How unstable and selfish I am," he thought. "Perhaps it was just my vanity that was hurt. Anyhow she did try to do her best."

He felt his way back, touched the patchwork quilt with his outstretched hand, and got into bed. Adela turned over. "Is that you, Chris?" she said. "I am so glad you are here. I have had such a bad dream." Chris put out his hand and stroked her forehead and the hair that fell in soft folds upon the pillow. "Poor darling," he said. "What a shame, you must have been overtired by what you went through yesterday," and he dozed off to sleep with a feeling of real concern for the happiness of the woman who was destined to spend so many future nights at his side.



SEVENTEEN



THE ensuing days were passed happily enough. They did much walking, sometimes following the coast, sometimes going inland over the downs. Chris

knew the country well and loved it. He was at ease in these bare rolling hills, separated sometimes by long low grey walls. He would see an old burial mound far off against the horizon and they would make their way towards it, stepping eagerly over the sheep-cropped turf, their movements disturbing an endless succession of butterflies, blue and brown. When he came to any ploughland he would advance slowly down a selected furrow, his eyes on the ground on the lookout for "worked flints." Adela became expert at finding these. It was the kind of definite activity that appealed to her, and she constantly stooped to pick up in her fingers a chipped fragment that perhaps had not been held in a human hand for five thousand years. It pleased Chris to collect these rude stones, each one of them representing so much deft work, and retaining often upon their split sides their ancient polish. It was in truth a certain shining look that differentiated them from the others, causing them to be conspicuous at a distance, especially when the sun shone after rain. At the end of the field they would sit down under a hedge and examine their spoils, throwing the "flakes" away, but putting the better specimens into his hare pocket. And the more he inspected these evidences of primitive human craft the more did his mind envisage the life of these ancient men, which, in the sight of God, had been enacted but yesterday. He saw them, these pristine artisans, sitting over their fires, for ever engaged upon their elementary employment. In those far-off years the

downs looked the same, the sea appeared in the same cupped way between the hills, and the sun shone down in the same ordinary manner. It always seemed extraordinary to him to know for a fact that these strong hairy people, lusty men and rank wild women, experienced the same kind of weather as had been experienced through the nineteenth, eighteenth, seventeenth, and all the centuries; that their eyes opened on rainy days, on bright laughing days, on cold days with grey clouds floating one behind the other. When the great leader was finally buried and the men had returned to their wattled huts, recalling the peculiarities of his personality, his courage and skill in hunting, the evening sun had lain flat on the freshly banked-up high grassless mound that they had so recently moved away from, had lain flat with the same convincing look of actuality. With the murmur of an existent antiquity in his head he would get up from between the shafts of the old roller, come to its harbourage by the gate, whose wheels were overgrown with dock leaves blotched now and then with circles of rusty red.

Perhaps even more than the downs Chris delighted in walking along the Chesil Beach. This enormous shelving bank of stones, stones rounded and polished by no human hand, encircled the West Bay like a necklace. Under the rocks of Portland the stones were as large as grindstones, but as the beach advanced westward they grew smaller and smaller, until in the neighbourhood of Bridport the pebbles had become as minute as grains of sand.

Especially one day when a high northwest wind swept across the harvested fields of Dorset did Chris enjoy crossing the Fleet to stand upon the sounding sea bank. He did not feel annoyed with Adela here as he had sometimes felt on their less strenuous expeditions. The Spartan temper of her nature seemed strangely in harmony with the feeling of the natural embattlement. Her hair became soaked with little particles of driving rain, of driving spray, and laughing, she took off her hat. Herring gulls and great black-backed gulls passed over their heads, moaning and crying. Like determined monstrous whales, grey wave after grey wave advanced towards them. They saw them raise their vast bulging backs far out to sea and watched them in their passage over the wide restless acres, watched them until they broke at their feet, hurling vast masses of water farther and farther up the beach. And in the resurgence, in the sucking backwards, with the deafening sound of tumbling pebbles and the swirling eddies of receding foam, what gulfs were exposed! So steep, indeed, was the beach that in an interval before the breaking of the succeeding wave it was as though the very depths had yawned; down, down, down the water receded as though to the bottom of an abyss. There was a moment when one saw into the throat of the ocean, as though it were the throat of a dragon with evil tonsils, treacherous and slippery. In the second of suspense a man could surely walk under the caving wall of overtoppling water, and then again with a roar the sea would well and

brim, like a flooded mill-pool race as high as the topmost shingle.

Chris and Adela held each other by the hands and watched and watched. Then as it grew dark and the burden of that lashed rain-wet seascape would weigh upon their spirits, they sought refuge once more in the small parlour, with its cheap coloured picture of Queen Victoria, its photograph of a cat with a chain round its neck, and its china ornaments and little mats. And all night long as he woke to the creak and sway of the elm tree bough Chris thought of these vast darkened spaces, of those enormous individual waves forever gathering to themselves strength and volume—beating and receding, subsiding and regathering, far out beyond the level ledges of oolite that resisted the advance of the caldron ocean at the Bill. Fortunate for men that there was land, fortunate that they could creep into small recesses where they could lie safe and snug under thatch.

He turned towards Adela with a deep gratitude and affection, holding her body, so strong and youthful and sweet, in his arms and showering her lips with tender kisses. "Chris, can't you sleep? I am so sleepy," she said.

"I shall have to go to the Chesil Beach and gather eryngo," he whispered, "and bring it back to the Inn and get old Mrs. Ford to boil it down in a saucepan for you to drink."

"What are you talking about?" she asked. "You will spoil my night if you wake me up. How wild

it is outside. I don't believe it ever blows so hard at Eastbourne. I certainly have never known it to be like this." She rested now away from him with her left cheek on the pillow, and a few minutes later they were both asleep.



EIGHTEEN



THE next morning when he came down to breakfast Chris noticed amongst his letters an envelope addressed to him in Raymond's handwriting. Adela was still upstairs. He stood for a moment regarding the clean homely table set for two, with its white tea cups and brown tea pot, and its green plate in the shape of a fig leaf with a pancake of Devonshire cream upon it. The morning sunlight was slanting in upon the sagging armchair covered with slippery imitation leather. The room was cheerful. Chris had often noticed the peculiar cheerfulness belonging to a morning after a storm, as though the wind and rain had washed the world clean, had purified each grass blade and weed and driven far over the hills all melancholy thoughts.

He decided to go out into the street for a moment. The air was fresh. A few steps brought him to the churchyard. Under a wall some way within the in-

closure was a stone coffin upon the end of which sat the very same old man whom Chris had observed in the bar on their first evening. He was smoking a pipe in complete contentment. Chris stood by him for some moments in silence. At length he made a comment upon the weather. "Yes! 'twere terrible rough last night," the old man said. "'Twas wild out in Bay, but 'tweren't so rough as I have seen en. I mind one winter at Christmas time when the waves did stand on end and come ramping across thick Chesil as though 'twere nought. 'Tis sommat to see God's works when the devil be tormanting o' 'em. Oh! Darset be a county, there bain't no county to match en, and no mistake. And you mind how ancient Darset be. This here stone upon which my backside be a-resting, 'a mid be in grown' for a thousand years and be as good now as ever 'a were."

Chris looked at the massive stone hollowed out as a receptacle for the bones of man. The hole cut for the skull to rest in seemed to him curiously small. How unmistakably human, though, was its appearance! If animals could devise receptacles for their bones would they also look as characteristic? If cattle, for instance, had graveyards, would their coffins be so easily recognisable, with wide, deep hollows for the reception of sober horned heads? "This hardly seems big enough to hold a man's skull," Chris said, indicating the higher end of the old man's resting-place.

"Maybe 'twere carved out for a maid," he answered. "Maids' heads be little, their hands be lit-

tle, and their little nesties be little, and yet do pester a man to know what's in 'em. I do often think that, maybe, this here stone were worked out to hold the bones of the maid in window above where dairy-man Jack do sit on Zundays a-paring of his nails and taking thistle thorns out of his thumbs in sermon time. That little maid be a picture. Since I were a nipper about in these parts I have looked at she with hair so light as primrose in ditch. 'Tis a pity, I have said, that she were ever buried—with her winsome look. But 'tis what we all must come to, mind, whether we be long or short. 'Tis nature, and darned if God his own self can hinder it, nor his precious son neither, though I bain't be saying he didn't do his best, a-leaving his golden throne to bide along be we." The old man paused and laid his straw hat on the edge of the stone coffin. Automatically, with complete unconsciousness of what he was doing, he put down his brown hand to kill a spider that had ventured to cross his workaday trousers. "There be many sights in this here county," he continued. "You should go to see his Lordship's swannery—there sure enough be sommat, girt white birds as common as poultry!"

At this moment Chris caught sight of Adela's figure coming down the street. He said good day to the old man and hurried out of the churchyard in her direction, glad at heart at seeing her, and with eager anticipation for the breakfast that he knew was by now ready for him. Adela poured out his tea while he cut two slices of bread from the cottage

loaf, the bottom of which, having been over-baked, was nothing but a thin brittle layer of black crust that at the touch of the steel broke into flakes.

"What did you mean, Chris, last night when you woke me up in the storm and began talking about a plant called eryngo? What is eryngo?"

"Oh! I don't know," he answered, laughing. "It was only a fancy. I happened to see the plant as we were coming away from the beach yesterday, but it was blowing and raining so hard that I did not stop to show it you."

"What kind of a plant is it?"

"It is sea-holly, and in the old days men and boys used to come to the Chesil Beach from all over Dorset to gather it. In June they would leave their pitchforks in the festooned hedges and traverse miles of meadowlands to fetch a few leaves of it. They would cross the Stour and the Frome. They would trudge down lanes. They would disturb the plovers on the flinty downs, pass by endless sleeping farms, and all to bring back in their satchels the leaves of this flower."

"Why did they want it so much?"

"It was necessary to their happiness."

The ambiguity of Chris's replies and a certain ironic expression in his eyes teased Adela. "Why can't you answer my question quite simply?" she said.

"The sap of eryngo is supposed to be an aphrodisiac," he replied.

"What is that?"

"It is anything that excites a person's physical appetite, making him eager for amorous embraces."

"How I hate the way you use the word amorous! Why can't you be like other people? You seem to take a delight in what is nasty. Why can't you love me in a healthy clean way? After all, what we have to do to get children should not be made so much of."

Chris remained silent, and a silence tenuous and dangerous spread its wings over the small room. At last an old woman came down the street, and the noise of her shoes as she passed the window broke the spell. Chris helped himself to some Devonshire cream and began opening Raymond's letter. It had been forwarded from Eastbourne and it was much taken up with a girl with whom he intended to spend the next weekend, probably at Brimstone in Dorset. It also referred to the prospects of a bookshop he had opened in London. Chris put down the letter. Brimstone was the other side of Weymouth, within easy reach of Abbotsbury. They must certainly go over and visit them on Sunday afternoon. He was conscious of an uneasiness at the prospect of suggesting the plan to Adela. It was as though some inner awareness, some unreasoning knowledge, warned him that the proposal he was going to make would raise difficulties. "I have had a letter from my friend Raymond, and he says he is going to spend the weekend at Brimstone, which is quite near here. I thought it would be nice if we went over to see them on Sunday afternoon."

“Why do you say ‘them’?” she inquired.

“Because he has a girl friend with him.”

“A girl friend?” Her voice had the very tone of the conventional world when it is on the scent of some deviation from its codes, a tone eagerly aggressive for damaging evidence, but at the same prudently simulating a harmless curiosity. “It seems odd that he should go alone into the country with a girl friend. Are they staying in a hotel?”

“I don’t know. He just says he is going to stay at Brimstone.”

“What is the young woman’s name?” she inquired coldly.

“Diana,” he said. The breakfast to which he had so looked forward was now utterly lost. He was glad to escape from it, and as he went down the garden path by a row of sunflowers on his way to the closet he thought to himself, “Marriage certainly is the devil. She can never change me, and it looks as if I shall never be able to change her, and this is only the beginning.”



NINETEEN



GOING upstairs, Adela paused at a small window from which, over a round bulging water butt, the

garden could be seen. She caught a glimpse of Chris's disappearing head. She was troubled. She knew that she had estranged him. Whenever their conversations touched on this hateful subject they ended in distress. She felt at a disadvantage. She could never put clearly what she thought about these things, yet she knew her feelings were right. This recurrent harping upon sex was not a good thing. She was sure of that. It was the bad side of Chris's nature. He made altogether too much of it. Why wasn't it enough for them to be just happy in each other's company? She went into their bedroom. Immediately her depression increased. The bed in which they had spent the night had not yet been made. Its disorder seemed to suggest only too plainly what had taken place before they had got up. Did he want to undermine her self-respect? He was asking something of her that she could never give. She went to the window. Through the leaves of the elm tree she could see a portion of the church tower. "I don't want to become what he wants me to become," she thought.

The following Sunday was a most perfect September day. They took the train to Weymouth, which was the first stage of their journey. The country they looked at out of the window had a deserted sabbatical look. The stubble fields, the meadows, the small patches of cottage gardens, lay undisturbed in the bright daylight. Now and again, straggling down a road or lane, they would see men and women and children in Sunday clothes.

On reaching Weymouth they made their way to the statue, where they were to catch a bus that would take them to Brimstone. As they waited for the conveyance, Chris examined the massive monument under which they stood, erected by the grateful citizens of Weymouth in honour of the Hanoverian king. There George III stood, between the lion and the unicorn, confronting the esplanade with a certain Teutonic dignity, his plump well-lined chops bright in the seaside sun. Even that stolid sovereign had found life difficult, his misused energy leading him eventually to the madhouse!

These fugitive meditations were interrupted by the arrival of the bus. Within half an hour they had reached their destination and were walking along a field path in the direction of his friend's lodging. They had not gone far when Chris recognized Raymond's figure approaching them. By his side was a young girl, a child almost it seemed. The four met. Chris noticed a certain stiffness in Adela's salutation. "She dislikes Raymond and suspects Diana," he thought. But this slight vexation was almost immediately obliterated by his own lively excitement, not only at being in the company of his friend, but in the personality of this companion he had discovered.

Diana Forman was a very uncommon girl. "She has a child's body and a child's face," this was Chris's immediate impression. But as he walked by her side he soon realized that this child's face was capable of expressions of illuminated spiritual

gravity almost puritanical in their intensity. The small bones, small as the bones of a bird, were quickened by a capacity for emotional response that even in the short interval that elapsed while they were crossing the fields convinced Chris with how deep and how burning a passion she could love. She looked like an angel, but not like an innocent angel of the pictures. She suggested a maiden in a white apron returning to gather watercress in a spinney where she had seduced a rook-boy three mornings running. This impression did not come from what the girl said. It was taken from the quick glance of her eyes, the dainty deliberation with which her sandaled feet touched the ground, and the way her small hot hand clutched at the hazel wand she was carrying.

"It is the first time we have been away together," she said. "These things are always difficult to arrange; wherever one goes people are so stupid, but you need not feel nervous about the bookshop. I have been careful not to disturb that."

"I can see well that you could, if you wished, disturb any man's preoccupation with anything. You are like a fairy that swims to its bed each night in the cup of a water lily."

Diana did not seem altogether pleased with this remark, and she looked up suspiciously. They were approaching a stile. The girl wore no stockings. When she reached the obstacle she swung herself over the bar before even Chris, who was conscious of the approach of the other two, was able to satisfy

his desire of seeing the momentary disarray of her frock. He could hear snatches of the conversation behind him, a stereotyped lifeless conversation about the heat of London in the summer, the beauty of the sea, the seclusion of the coastline. Adela's voice came to his ears, firm, assured, unhesitating. "Yes. I have always considered Dorset one of the jolliest counties. It is not so grimmish as those of East Anglia and not so gardenish as Kent." He knew the appraising power of his friend. "He will never see her good qualities," he thought. "It is not so much what she is saying, but the affected pretentious tone of her voice. I have married a bore," he thought, and looked despondently at the winding mud path at his feet—only for a moment, however, for his eyes were soon diverted. The ankles of his companion were as small and brown as a donkey boy's on the sands at Weymouth.



THE luncheon was not a success. Chris felt as if he were moving between traces, whereas Raymond and his friend were free of any such restraint. Secretly in his heart he envied them with a deep nostalgic envy, but he was resolved by every possible means

to justify his own marriage in their eyes. He talked of the weeks that he and Adela had spent at Abbotsbury, of the impression that the wedding had left on his mind. Before, in discussing the last topic, Adela had seemed to sympathize and understand his reactions. She now, as she extracted the meat from the hooked claw of the lobster she was eating, seemed altogether to disapprove of what he was saying. "You are too hard on our friends," she interjected, with a not too affable little laugh. "I am sure they are very good people in their way. They certainly have always been very kind to me. I think weddings are always difficult. Don't you find them so?" and she turned towards Diana, who was sprinkling some red pepper on the salad she was preparing. There had been a certain undercurrent of antipathy between the two women which seemed now to come to the surface with Diana's "I really don't know about them." The words hung suspended in the close air of the cottage room.

"All women are either mothers or harlots, cows or cats," thought Chris. As a matter of fact Raymond was so engaged in his own emotional relationship with Diana that he had no thought of his friend's dilemma. Adela was Chris's choice. There was no reason why he should concern his head further. Diana was far more aware of the implications of the meeting. She felt stimulated by Chris, but despised Adela. Her inner being was outraged by this disciplined lady-like woman, who, if she could do so, would, she knew, impose her tiresome second-

rate values upon every one living. Diana was a propagandist for freedom. She had been brought up under the domination of the most rigid moral injunctions and carried to her new cause the fanaticism of a convert. It was this fury of revolt that recognized in Adela, as she sat at the table in an almost articulate state of refined withdrawal, an enemy. Adela on her part was jealous of the free grace of her hostess and defended herself by tacitly representing the attitude of the outside world, the standards, mental and moral, of the people she knew at Eastbourne.

"I ought never to have brought her," thought Chris. "She is spoiling everything. Why can't she be melting and sweet as she is with me?" The conversation flagged, flickered, failed. Diana sat on the sofa with one brown knee curling over the other and lit a cigarette. "Thank you, I am not fashionable, I don't smoke," Adela said as Raymond handed her his silver case. In her cane chair by the window she seemed now to have completely detached herself from the company. "Would you like to see our room upstairs?" Diana made the suggestion with a little proffered smile of conciliation.

When the door closed behind the two women the men smoked for some minutes in silence. "Adela seems different today, she is not at all like this really."

"I like her very much," his friend replied, wishing to be conciliatory. Again there was a silence.

"Are you going to marry Diana?" Chris inquired at last.

"I would in a moment if she would let me," the other answered, "but she doesn't believe in marriage. She holds the theory that everybody should be free."

"God! that's not very reassuring for you, is it?"

"No, it isn't at all reassuring," answered Raymond with a wry look.

"She certainly is a most remarkable girl," Chris responded, and there was real conviction in his voice. Raymond poured himself out another glass of port. "Never since the world began," Chris continued, "has a moral woman got on with an unmoral woman. It's a disagreement that is temperamental, like that of cats and dogs."

They all went out presently and followed a winding path down to the sea. The side of the cliff was embossed with bramble bushes. The fruit hung thick upon them, softening the summer air with its sweet fragrance. Adela now appeared more friendly. She gathered the berries from the most inaccessible sprays, handing her spoil to Raymond, who stood at a safe distance from the prickly tangled growths. Chris also pushed his way far into the patches, and emerging with his hand full of the largest finest blackberries, approached Diana where she sat on a tussock, like an elf. "These are for you," he said, "but before you eat any I beg you to smell them. I think blackberries smell better than any other fruit, better than raspberries even. They smell like

the breath of a donkey which has had nothing but bundles of musk thistle-heads for its fodder. All lovely living things have their particular smell—girls also, that's why I so dislike the present free use of cosmetics. It is as though women tried to disguise the pure essence that their bodies give to the air with these terrible synthetic perfumes."

Diana gave him a glance of understanding, exquisite in its swift flight as she shaded her eyes from the sun. At that moment there flashed across Chris's consciousness two separate preoccupations. As the girl had raised her hand he had caught sight of the dainty shadow of the hair under her arm, and the glimpse of so intimate and native a growth on a body as childlike as this girl's transfixed him with a pang of desire, while at the same moment his talk of the individual fragrance that emanates from the sweet flesh of girls reminded him with a stab of the particular freshness, like heather, like apples in a loft, that belonged to Adela. Jesus had said that but to look on a woman with desire was equivalent to possessing her, and at that moment under the grey-blue lias cliffs Chris endured a sensation of genuine remorse as though the attraction he felt for this tiny creature before him did actually amount to a betrayal of his wife. After all there was something very restoring in Adela's healthy athletic love. She was his wife. They had been happy together.

He must have shown his troubled distrust in his expression, for Diana said, still looking at him under her shading fingers, "What are you think-

ing?" The question, coming so pat on his thoughts, startled him. In his confusion he sought for something that would divert the attention of this disconcerting girl at his side, and his eyes lighted on a strange-looking object that protruded out of the clay a little way up the cliff behind them. "That is a peculiar-looking stone," he said. "I will climb up to it."

Raymond and Adela had now approached. "Why this sudden interest in geology?" his friend said as he seated himself on the ground, indolently stretching out his long legs, his white flannel trousers half hidden in the dry grass. Adela scrambled up the cliff with Chris, and together they dislodged the odd-shaped stone from its bed in the crumbling slate. "What is it?" Adela asked.

Chris, holding the heavy object in both hands, brought it back to where the two were sitting. It was not the bone of an ox or horse. It was too large even to belong to an elephant. Obviously it was a fragment of what had once belonged to the enormous anatomy of a prehistoric animal. There could be no doubt of it; in its condition of petrification it still retained the shape of its original mould when it had made up part of the form of one of those fabulous beasts who had moved over the face of the world before the invention of recording letters. All that afternoon while he and Raymond bathed, while all four drifted homeward up the dry cliff paths, Chris could not free his mind of the thoughts suggested by the heavy trophy he carried. This piece

of matter came directly into his hands from a time more ancient than that of the Stone Age man, from a time when these rough-textured mare's-tails, so scaly and queer to the touch, had not yet lost their vegetable sovereignty, but constituted in a magnified growth the vast feathery forest foliage through which these creatures floundered to their watering-places. It was as though his mind had been drugged by the vanished mists of past time. This exquisite little girl, Adela, Raymond, and himself were playing and walking on ground quickened by the miracle of an immemorial antiquity.

"I wouldn't take that great bone home. It's too heavy," Adela said. "You can see hundreds of them in any museum. It will delay us in our walk to the bus, and I really think we ought to be starting soon."



TWENTY-ONE



DIANA was tired; so they said good-bye to their friends at the cottage gate. For some time they walked in silence. Chris was eager to know what Adela had thought of the two they had left, but they had crossed three meadows before she spoke. "I liked your friend, but I can't say I took much to his companion. She seemed to me so very affected."

The stupid injustice of the criticism Chris found particularly irritating, but he made no defence of Diana, fearing if he did so that a quarrel might be started. They continued on their way. From time to time Chris found it necessary to stop for a moment so as to rearrange the dinosaur's bone which he was carrying in his arms. The sea was so calm that it appeared to brim against the red pebbles of the beach without a splash or ripple. The gulls passed over their heads in silent flight. Soft puffs of evening air came against them at intervals as they walked; sometimes these seemed cool with the coolness of dew and sometimes with the coolness of the salt sea. They walked on, entertaining their own particular thoughts.

Adela had been distressed by the day's experience. The glimpse she had got of these friends of Chris's had emphasized the essential difference between herself and her husband. These people were not of her kind, she thought, and immediately she tried to console herself by considering them in the light of the conventional world. The girl would never do. Her unusual dress would give her away, and she had no conversation. Those little stilted sententious observations would never come off at a tea party. On a layer below her surface mind Adela was envious of Diana. She seemed to belong to those people who approached ideas as though they had a right to discuss them. She herself always felt outside such conversations, as if the solution of all important abstract problems had been discovered long

ago by the leaders of church and state and it was little better than an impertinence for ordinary people to offer their opinions. And yet in that cottage she had felt that nothing was safe, that her most sacred beliefs might in the next moment be attacked. Raymond and Diana seemed to belong to a rebel world. She suspected them. They were wrong, altogether wrong, she was sure of it. How could Chris be taken in by them?

Her meditations were disturbed by a man and woman and a little boy who had stepped out of the path to let them pass. "Ma! Ma!" the child called. "My nose be wet." The mother stooped and wiped the round face with her handkerchief. Chris, who was walking a few steps in front of Adela, half turned his head. "What a tiresome little snotty-nosed boy," he thought. "Women like Diana would destroy all family life," was Adela's mental comment upon this scene. She remembered how the teasing girl, as she stood by her in the upstairs room, had said with the suggestion of a challenge in her voice, "This is the bed we sleep in." "She is an undesirable woman. I suppose there is no limit to what she could be persuaded to do with herself."

They reached Abbotsbury to find their supper all ready for them in the little room. Mrs. Ford had gone to church. They sat opposite each other, tired and dispirited. "I think we had better go back to Eastbourne on Saturday so that we will have two days for settling in before the term begins." The expression "settling in" added to Chris's depression.

It brought to his mind all those necessary unnecessary preparations incident to the comfort of human beings in modern times—the airing of sheets, the airing of rooms, the telephoning to tradespeople, and the consequent activities that resulted from them.

When he had finished his last cup of tea he rose from the table, saying that he would take a little walk before going to bed. He felt for his stick in the darkened hallway, stumbling against the great bone that he had laid down near the umbrella stand. The darkness smelt of drying mackintoshes, and of cooking, and of Sunday. He had always hated Sundays; even the sound of church bells troubled him. "The jangling of chains" was all that they were.

Once out in the air his mood became less clouded. It was almost dark, and already above his head small dots of light indicated the near approach of night. He followed a lane that wound its way in the direction of the sea, past the wall of the swannery. Like a horse he raised his head, snuffing the air of the oncoming darkness. "A simple road like this," he thought, "alternately lit by the sun, by the moon, holds the secret of liberation more than any religious building." He could not reconcile himself to the conviction that his marriage had been a mistake—and yet if he was restless now what would he be like in five or ten years' time? He must be considerate and give up in small ways and win Adela little by little to his manner of living. Yet young as she was she seemed "set." He smiled

grimly. "I suppose I am reaping the harvest of Uncle Hughy's sowing."



TWENTY-TWO



THEY were sitting down for their first dinner at The Trossachs. For the early part of the term, while the final decorations to the house were being made, they had stayed at the school as guests of the headmaster. Chris felt relieved that they were at last installed in their own home. He found Adela's uncle extremely difficult to get on with at close quarters. He made him feel nervous. He came more than ever to dislike his clean clerical features which each recurring morning surveyed the breakfast table with such unvarying cheerfulness. There was never a speck of dust or dirt on his smooth round priest's collar. This piece of starched linen used to fascinate Chris with a horrible fascination. He used to wonder how it was fastened. In some neat hidden way at the back, he supposed. On Sunday, after early service, he would enter the room full of unctuous good spirits. Chris supposed it was the sight of the marmalade, for he ate of this preserve very freely. He would suddenly appear all black and white, all neat and crisp, and step lightly to his place with a jocular

well-phrased sentence and a smile on his lips that would persist until he had opened out his napkin and addressed himself to his meal. A faint smell of sacramental wine would then float over the napery, and over the hot rolls that Emily, the little servant, in her stiff cap, would bring so discreetly into the room. This slight vinous aroma would be sufficient to set Chris's mind agog. He would, as his eyes fell upon the polished brass handles of the sideboard, speculate upon the long history of this religious rite, of this rite so savage, so pitiful, so wild in its conception, which after so many strange turns had come to be practised in so smug a manner. He thought of the dramatic whisper of its origin, its spontaneous beginning in the small upper chamber at Jerusalem, the half barbarous genius that its inauguration suggested, the age-long story of its repetition reduced at last in this English private school to a mere matter of strict convention.

Mr. Hinny was undoubtedly as glad as he that they were now lodged under different roofs. For all his jocular urbanity, his facetious good humour, he had recognized in Chris an enemy. As long as the young man sat at his breakfast table his superior suavity was liable to be jolted. There was no issue of life upon which the two were not in disagreement. Chris's silences, his comments sparsely interjected, often had the effect of ruffling the elder man's equanimity. The smooth features would suddenly grow rigid and it would become apparent that the soft surface covered an interior hard and compact.

He would be talking of the way the Government was dealing with a strike, and Chris would make some reference to the appalling distress that prevailed in the disturbed district. "There is always a great deal of exaggeration in such reports," the clergyman would say, turning his head quickly like a snappish terrier. "Unless they can come to some agreement on a sound economic basis the resulting misery will be far greater. We all of us feel sorry for the workers, but they are misled by their leaders. Undoubtedly a certain redistribution of wealth is desirable, but such changes must come about slowly. The first duty of any state must always be to preserve law and order." A speech of this kind would be followed by a polite clearing of his throat, loud, but not too loud to frighten away the greenfinches that had come to eat crumbs at the open window.

Chris, as he sat at dinner at The Trossachs that night, was conscious of a distressing suspicion that his home was, after all, but a reproduction on a smaller scale of the headmaster's. He now was "the master," to use the significant word by which Adela always referred to him, when she had occasion to remind one of the servants of his preferences. He thought of the butcher's boy, the baker's boy, the boy who brought the *Times* on a bicycle, and of how in their minds he had come to share with the other householders of Sycamore Avenue his modicum of respectful interest. He had become a pillar of society, a small pillar, but yet a pillar; the silver on the polished sideboard testified to this, the bath-

room with its cork mat, the well-appointed kitchen. But with his covert distress there came also a feeling of satisfaction. The little study upstairs which Adela had so carefully set apart for him was comfortable. He promised himself many delightful hours there. His books had been arranged round the walls. He liked also the small garden at the back of the house. It contained in its centre a big apple tree, one of the few surviving out of a large orchard that had stood here before the far-seeing land agent had bought the property for development. At present the small plot was damp and melancholy, the tiny path that ran round it grown upon with moss and sprinkled over with small leaves. At its farther end the garden was littered with horse chestnuts that scattered themselves down from a branch overhanging the wooden fencing separating his property from that of his neighbour.

It was the next day when they sat down to tea for the first time in the drawing-room that he had been most possessed by this feeling of being trapped. He had been teaching history all the afternoon and he came home in good spirits. As he walked up the Avenue he had relished the smells of autumn in the air, those indefinable smells with their suggestion of the dead stalks of phlox and larkspur and honesty, committed now to the bonfire along with the refuse of the kitchen garden. The smoke-tainted air came to his nostrils with a faint crispness, as if there might be a frost soon, and the indefinable miasma of decaying saturation rising from the tidy heaps

of sycamore leaves which an old man with an injured eye was stuffing into a green town council cart refreshed him. The boys had been more than usually attentive. He remembered the silence of the classroom as he had walked up and down its length, describing England as it was before the coming of the Romans. Certainly it was a privilege to teach. He had got the impression that afternoon that his words actually awakened the imaginations of these children, as if they would never forget what he had said, as if in those two hours he had actually forwarded a cause dear to his heart. How he would love to have a free hand to lead out their minds, to explain to them that there was no absolute truth, that all was open for exploration! The Rev. Hugh would strenuously object to any school curriculum of the kind. His purpose was to pen in, bank up, fortify.

Chris had found Adela sitting before the tea table, manipulating the flame under the silver kettle. Suddenly, without reason or warning, he had felt again the sensation of being smothered, suffocated. The upholstered armchair he sat down in seemed too deep and too wide; the spacious sofa, with a copy of the *Bystander* lying upon its broad stuffed-out back, overweighed him. The pictures they had hung so recently, the ornaments they had bought, filled him with sadness; the heavy rugs, the brass coal box, the waste-paper basket, so light and so expensive-looking, began a conspiracy of derision as he sat there in momentary silence, his cup and

saucer on his knee. "This is what your life is going to be for weeks, for months, for years—indeed, until the baker boy's son's son stands agape in the Eastbourne street to see the funeral procession pass by of 'one of the masters at the school.' "



TWENTY-THREE



"IT WOULD be nice," Adela said a few weeks later, "if we gave a small dinner party." Chris acquiesced. He had been reading in his study, the curtains closely drawn, and Adela had come up to him from the drawing-room, where she had been writing letters at her little rosewood table. He had Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* on his knees, and the solid pungent paragraphs of the old Oxford scholar had given him sustenance. Half consciously he had been following the familiar sounds that indicated the progress of the domestic routine: the maid, carrying the tea things into the kitchen, keeping the drawing-room door ajar by means of a brass weight with a flat back which she was able to move into place with her neat servant's foot. He had heard her modulated voice as she had spoken a few obedient words with her mistress before she finally left with the last tray, and a few minutes later he had caught echoes of

her laughter with the kitchen maid as, with incredible good will and good nature, the two had set about their diurnal task of washing the Royal Worcester tea cups. "The eternal recurrence of all things," this constant washing up was like that, but anyhow tea things were not as bad as the greasy luncheon plates. How that hour, the hour after luncheon, depressed him! Two o'clock in the afternoon was the worst hour of all the day—a hideous, arid, desolate hour when plates with gristle and scraps of potato and vile fragments of food rejected from the mouth held empire. It was a worse hour than two o'clock at night, more banal, more heinous, though two o'clock at night was bad enough, when the pulse of man ran low and people easily died. He had once more crossed his legs, looking with a feeling of well-being at his evening shoes which had replaced the muddy boots he had been wearing during the day, those boots which now, he knew, were resting side by side in the darkness under the scullery table awaiting transformation at the thin hands of the boy Thomas in his green apron the next morning. It was pleasant to feel the heat of the fire against his pumps.

And now Adela had come upstairs with her suggestion. They decided to invite another schoolmaster and his wife and also some friends of Raymond's who had called on them and whom, when they had returned the call, walking up the small winding path side by side with self-conscious deliberation, Chris had liked. They were both writers; the man

interested in sociology and the woman a novelist and a contributor to certain literary journals. His name was Mansfield, but his wife preferred to be known as Miss Mary Kennedy, which had been her maiden name. Adela felt a certain reluctance about asking the last couple, but as they had been suggested by Chris, thought it best to make no objection. If this dinner party was a success they would have others. She sat down opposite him, her head full of exciting plans. They would have the dinner on the following Thursday.

Chris's interests at the moment had been completely diverted from the idea of the dinner. A certain passage he had been reading in Burton and a glimpse of his wife's thigh, the matchlessly white flesh of which had been momentarily revealed as she crossed her legs, had set his thoughts and purposes in quite a different direction. He got up from his chair, and kneeling down in front of her, began passionately to embrace her. Adela at first was flattered by this sudden demonstration of devotion. "He is pleased," she thought, "because of the prospect of the dinner party. He is taking pleasure in his home as I always knew he would." However, as it became gradually clear to her that his purpose in coming over to her chair was by no means prompted by innocent affection, she felt alarmed and put out. Defending herself as best she was able, she escaped from the chair. "Christopher, how can you?" she said, her face flushed with shame and indignation. "Any one might come in, and anyhow a sitting-room

is no place—for—for”—she still hesitated—“for coition,” she said at last slowly.

Chris on his part felt nothing but humiliation. His action had been completely spontaneous. Adela in their intimate moments at night had recently been slightly less cold, and he had imagined the play they had sometimes enjoyed in the darkness of their chamber might very well be re-enacted in front of the fire in his study.

“But, Adela, if people want to make love they don’t always have to be in bed,” he said ruefully. “Why, children have been begotten in harvest fields, in gardens, in bake houses, in palace antechambers, in churches. The place is of no consequence. It is the mood. It is a mistake not to welcome desire when and wherever it comes. This is how desire is killed, and when it is dead, you may know that life goes maimed, its wings trailing.”

“Chris, I hate all your talk,” she answered. “I think all this kind of thing is disgusting. People never ought to come together unless they want children—and in your study with lights I think it’s horrible. You want to make me like a woman of the street.”

They were standing together near the bookcase. Her words at first roused Chris. He felt his anger mounting, as though a tiny little caldron of malice somewhere in his head were beginning to sing and hiss before coming to a boil. Then suddenly as he looked at her and listened to her, his mood altered. He seemed to see their difference as a difference of

temperament, of upbringing, as something inevitable with nothing of blame in it for either of them, and though her lips were still closed in a hard bitter way he felt no irritation but took her hand with their wedding ring upon it and kissed it.

"I am sorry," he said. "I dare say I was wrong. I won't be so irresponsible another evening. Come now, forgive me, and sit down again on your chair and let us continue our discussion."

This conciliatory tone, so unexpected, had the effect of melting his wife's severity. She gave him a kiss on his forehead and went back to her chair as though nothing had happened. "We might try to get a bottle of that liqueur that we liked so much at the Capel-Taylors' last week, and I will tell Amelia to get out the china that your Uncle Jack gave us. We might also get some ice cream sent up from Rigoli's."

"That would be splendid," said Chris absently. "How extraordinary! She is unaware that anything has happened. She is as eager about the dinner as she was before. Yet I feel as if my very being had been traduced, as if the invalidity of our relationship had been proved beyond doubt, as if I now knew for certain what before I had only suspected. As long as I am what I am and she is what she is we can never get on together. Burton would have been interested in this evening's scene if he could have looked in upon us from his college window. I hope she will go soon, so that I can go on reading."



TWENTY-FOUR



THE Thursday of the dinner party had arrived, and Chris that afternoon made his way to his class room in no very happy mood. Had his life been reduced to interests like this? Wherever you get shallow pretentiousness you get vulgarity, and yet it was the kind of interest that absorbed the energy of almost all the people they knew. As he scraped the mud from his boots on the large iron scraper at the school's entrance he thought of the men and women in countless numbers who tried to satisfy their egoism by means of some kind of unhappy paraded hospitality. He rubbed his right boot against one of the brushes with which the scraper was fitted. Little scraps of mud fell from it into the polished iron receptacle. He thought of the people of Eastbourne, of the ideas prevalent in their society, and such unpleasant words as "façade" and "veneer" came into his head. No, it wasn't so simple to explain; using unpleasant words didn't elucidate anything; the emotion that kept them going was genuine enough. Like children, they wanted to show off. Anyhow people had to have dinner, there was no harm in that. Why then were the dinners so distasteful? It was because the grace of social intercourse was in some way subordinated to the conduct of the function itself. These provincial people had

no real culture, no real distinction, and were at pains to conceal their shortcomings by straining to approximate their entertainments to a kind of objective standard of the conventional world which they themselves to a large measure had invented. How self-conscious such gatherings were! And what conversation—conversation about politics coloured with the contemporaneous prejudices of the war, conversations about golf, about motor cars that were safely housed in their garages! It was really a marvel that so many people could be content to live within the limited circle imposed on them by their local class environment.

To reach his form room he had to pass the kitchen. Before him was the swing door covered with green baize that opened into that part of the house devoted to the school. He could hear the confused voices of the boys as they stood about, waiting for the bell to ring. The kitchen door was slightly ajar, and looking through the aperture, he caught sight of the parlour maid, Emily, standing high up on some steps. She had evidently heard him, for she turned her head. Their eyes met. In that second, without plan or purpose, without preparation, a secret current connected the man and the girl. It flashed from one to the other and back again. The servant gave a discreet but conspiring smile. Chris answered it, hesitated for a moment, and then hurried on to the swing door, his books under his arm. How was it, he thought, that one look of that kind brought such rejuvenescence with it!

As he entered his classroom he heard the voice of the master who was dining with him that evening say, "Yes, I was in ripping form—went over the course well—hope to do better still next week though—perhaps you will roll up there one afternoon. Jiggers was there today."

Well, he supposed that Russell's thoughts, in the opinion of most people, would be greatly preferred to his own. His lechery would be his damnation. He couldn't pass a kitchen but he must be making covert love to a maid winding a clock.

That afternoon he was teaching Roman history. An uncle of his had been a great collector of coins, and he had taken one of these out of the case in his study, a coin minted at Antioch by Antony, with his own head on one side and on the reverse the head of Cleopatra. This silver piece, about the size of a florin, was handed round the class. The debonair good-natured expression of the man's face was still apparent; the woman's was not so clear. It was encircled by two snakes, not so much resembling symbols of the Nile as symbols of the Orient, as he explained to the boys.

A few hours later and he was standing on his hearth rug entertaining the Mansfields. Adela entered. She certainly looked well dressed, cool, set up, and handsome. Her flesh hardly seemed like flesh, her pretty neck, her naked arms, her breasts, seemed to have lost for his eyes their individual charm. They had become standardized like her expensive gown. A pretty woman at a dinner party! That was

all. The bell rang and the schoolmaster and his wife were shown into the small room. The man came in smiling. He shook hands with Adela. "We nearly collided with the wall coming into your gate," he said. "One of the wheels of the car hit against the curb."

"I am sorry," answered Adela. "I must get Uncle Hugh to write to the Council and get them to put a better light at the corner of the road. It is dangerous."

"Oh! I wouldn't trouble to do that. We managed to shoot it all right, didn't we, Anne? My hand is in today. I had a good morning up on the hill—went over the course in topping style."

Chris did not miss a certain look of critical appraisal on Miss Kennedy's face as she half turned to inspect the voluble newcomer before being introduced. She gave him a slow grave reflective look as much as to say, "How can you come into a room like that? How can you talk like that? How can you look like that?" Yet Chris's colleague was not a bad man. His open face was there exposed before you without reservations of any kind, not well bred, not exactly ill bred, good-natured, placid, stupid. His wife was less presentable. She required no appraising—large, overdressed, and smelling of perfume, she was never for a moment silent. Talk tumbled from her. She could not be intimidated. She had often been too much for Adela, and this evening she was so again. "Yes, I have never known it so hot in November," she was saying. "It makes you want

to bathe in ice. I was simply dripping this morning, going round with Arthur."

"Dripping"—what an appallingly appropriate word to be associated with her! Not only sweat, but words seemed to drip from her.

They got through the dinner better than might have been expected, Adela directing the conversation with a social skill that surprised Chris. After they had finished the coffee and Amelia had carried away the small round gilt-rimmed cups with their tiny square-handled silver spoons, it was suggested by Russell that they should make up a game of bridge. Neither Miss Kennedy nor Chris played cards. They sat together on the sofa talking about Raymond. "Did you like Diana when you saw her in Dorset?" Miss Kennedy asked.

"Yes, we did."

"She is a brave girl," she said, smiling.

"I found her very attractive," Chris responded.

"She certainly is that, sexually," his companion agreed.

Chris was delighted to find himself with some one who could go to the heart of the matter with such unaffected directness. "I would like to talk to this woman freely," he thought. "I wonder if I could ask her up to my study."

A few moments later the two were going out of the drawing-room together. "I want to show Miss Kennedy the books in my study," Chris said, speaking to the card players. "Sitting out isn't allowed except at dances," Russell called, and as Chris

closed the door he heard a ripple of senseless feckless laughter come from the room.



TWENTY-FIVE



HE TURNED on the light and they entered the small room. "Oh! this is really delightful," Miss Kennedy exclaimed as she cast her eyes about the study. She noticed the dinosaur's bone on a shelf. "Why, that must be the one they told me you found in Dorset. How huge it is!" Chris was pleased. Adela had always resented his conveying the clumsy object back to The Trossachs. In her simple evening dress Miss Kennedy stood surveying the shelves, her hands clasped behind her back like a child. "I always feel happy when I get away from people," she said. "I like quiet." The window was a little open at the top, and through the aperture there came faint sounds from the town. "On wild nights it is possible to hear the sea," Chris remarked. "Mrs. Russell once asked what the sea said to me," he continued. "I did not for the life of me know what to answer." Miss Kennedy glanced at him with an unusual smile, her eyes slightly flickering.

They sat opposite each other near the fire. "Isn't it extraordinary how few people one is able to talk

to in the world? In my whole life I have only met two or three."

Miss Kennedy looked up. "It is extraordinary," she said. "And yet it is to a great extent our own fault. Every one has it in him to be interesting. They all have it in them to be interesting if our sympathy is subtle enough to reach them."

"I don't know," he answered. "I often seem to encounter people whose deliberate purpose would appear to be to evade every subject of interest."

"Perhaps you don't catch them in the right mood, or you yourself make them feel insecure. I believe there are occasions when even the most shallow people are glad to be serious. They find relief in it as though they were at a confessional, but it is necessary for them to feel confidence in the priest," she continued with a laugh.

"You may be right. I don't know. It seems to me that the aim of most people that one meets is to forget the dangerous background upon which life is played. If they can satisfy their egoism by acting a part, by busying themselves with the external world, all is well and they feel morally justified in covering up awkward thoughts. In this way death itself can be forgotten. They know their way round the hutch, that is all, and if they cut a brave figure in their hutch they are satisfied."

"I think it is done unconsciously," she said.

"But how unconsciously? At a moment's notice they are prepared to defend their ways by crying up the virtues of reserve and reticence. If one was abso-

lutely certain that the theories upon which life is directed in the conventional world were the correct theories, the understanding and imaginative theories, there would be no harm in concentrating all one's energies upon their practise."

"They are sure," she rejoined as she lifted the little brass tongs to rearrange a misplaced coal.

"Well! they ought not to be," he answered vehemently. "There is no action in life that should not be penetrated with criticism. I have often been told that the great thing is to get on with the work of the world and leave all analysis and discussion to ineffectual dilettante pseudo-philosophers, but it is just this misdirected moral energy that is then at fault. We train up boys to be loyal, patriotic, and honest in the yeas and nays of life, but we neglect to foster that personal integrity of outlook, humane, sceptical, and tolerant, that would, for instance, have saved us from the wicked stupidity of the last war. Public schools turn out boys who fight heroically, but unfortunately it is often in a thoroughly wrong cause. There is no step of life that we can afford to take without the sharpest consideration. Our conclusions in the end may well be false, but it is better than just going ahead blindly."

"The difference, I think, is this," she said. "You regard every circumstance that arises as completely novel, and you are right therefore to judge it without preconceptions, but other people regard the correct action under every circumstance as already fixed by certain arbitrary and unalterable codes. You are

probably nearer the truth, but you mustn't blame people for thinking differently. To understand the simple fact that wisdom is a matter of disillusionment is not easy for most of us. I dare say you are regarded in your school as being wilful. They probably actually believe you to be very immoral, or they would if they could see into your thoughts. You look upon them as failing in life, as choking up its pure stream with endless insincerities, as following their own selfish ends under cover of a camouflage of idealism that they would not dare to have challenged."

"Yes, that is just it," Chris answered as he lighted a cigarette. "They daren't think, they cannot afford to think. Thought endangers their whole life illusion. With death grinning at us like a toad we have only two alternatives, either never to let him out of our sight, or to forget about him and just follow our little competitive activities with our eyes blinkered."

"Can't you give up schoolmastering?" she interjected suddenly, looking up at him with equivocal understanding eyes.

"I often feel I would like to do so," he answered. "In some ways I am suited to it, though. Do you know, when I am teaching history I sometimes imagine that I can see the minds of the boys grow and develop, as though I were nourishing a bed of spring onions, and I suppose in this way I satisfy some essential need in my nature. But when I talk to the headmaster and observe how his purpose is

to fill the boys' minds with prejudices, I often feel as if I would like to chuck the whole thing."

"Perhaps you will one day," she commented. They remained silent. The peace of the small room nourished them. "I would so enjoy it if you would read me some poetry," she said.

He rose and went to the bookshelf, but he felt disinclined to waste these intimate moments that seemed so precious to him. For weeks, for months, he had been hungry for just such a conversation.

"May I come and see you sometime?" he said.

"I would love it if you did," she rejoined, and there was genuine pleasure in her voice.

"I often feel as if I am acting in this house, as though I might suddenly wake up and find that I had been dreaming, and yet I can hear in it, I can hear the tinkle of tea cups, can see in it, can see the polished banisters, can smell in it, can smell the scented soap in the bathroom—and yet it seems divorced, cut away, from the Universe. I suppose the moon does shine on its roof and on its well-fixed spouting, I suppose the same rain that soaks down on distant stubble fields, on restless watery wastes in the Channel, fills these gutters. I must at any rate take these things for granted. After all I am, I suppose, as the headmaster tells me I am, 'an active agent in a single divine system that is working for good.'"

It was now that they heard the drawing-room door open and Russell's voice. He was talking with Mr. Mansfield about an article in that morning's

Times that had discussed the possibility of trouble in the East. "It is a disgrace," he was saying, "that the Government keep so few soldiers in 'Mesopotamia.'"



TWENTY-SIX



THE friendship between Chris and Mary Kennedy grew stronger as the weeks passed. He would often visit her when Adela had gone out to attend one of the numerous parties to which she was invited. Adela no longer coerced Chris into accompanying her to such functions. A certain estrangement had grown up between them. The girl recognized now with an unacknowledged resignation that their essential tastes were different. There were moments when, as she was adjusting her hat before the mirror or opening a drawer in the dressing-table to look for her gloves, she would feel real sadness at the turn her married life had taken. She was, however, of an independent nature and was resolved to live in the manner she preferred. Chris was difficult. Well, she would have to make the best of it. He worked hard at the school, that was one thing in his favour. Conversation at meals became increasingly onerous. Chris never now discussed what he had been reading and seldom revealed his errant

thoughts. Whenever he made an effort to do so, she would discourage him by some commonplace remark which she offered ostensibly by way of correcting his "aberrations," but which actually was prompted by a certain unsureness in herself that inclined her to act the aggressor as a dog will bite or a cat scratch out of nervousness. Slowly, surely, as the winter term passed into the Easter term, it was clear that their lives were drawing apart. What he liked she did not like, what she liked he did not like, and neither of them was able to summon sufficient sympathy to bridge the gap. "I have been a fool. I ought never to have married," Chris thought. "Perhaps if I had a baby things would improve," was in Adela's mind. They seldom openly quarrelled. It might have been better if they had. A certain devitalized indifference seemed to freeze the heart out of the relationship. Chris realized only too well what was happening. He used to look at his wife across the table and think to himself, "She is a good girl and an attractive girl and yet I can't love her. It must be her mind that is wrong. I suppose it is the mind, the spirit, of a girl that counts much more than her outward graces, but she hasn't exactly an inferior mind. She is often lucid and logical. It must be that the colour of her mind is different from the colour of my mind. I don't feel antipathy for her, and I don't believe she does for me—we just feel unmoved by each other, that is all."

There were occasions when they used to recover

a semblance of reciprocity. Adela was proud of her garden, and as the spring advanced they would often walk together on the little lawn under the apple tree, observing and commenting upon each new sign of the advance of the season. Yet even under the apple tree Chris felt penned in. It used to annoy him to hear the messenger boys come to the back door along the tradesmen's entrance which was discreetly hidden by a wooden fence up which a rambler rose was being trained to grow. "These houses are all like so many cages filled with moulting canaries, male and female, fed on groundsel. I would like to pour out the sand from the floor, burn up the perches, and open the wire gates and let them out, every one of them, into the fields. Yet some canaries like cages, but I don't somehow think that Adela does really."

Russell and his wife used constantly to be coming to the house, and Adela seemed to take pleasure in their company. They persuaded her to get Thomas to mark out the grass under the apple tree for clock golf, and as the evenings lengthened and it was light after tea they would be constantly at play. The sound of their voices and the clicking the clubs made as they struck the ball used to exasperate Chris as he sat alone in his study. The punctilious futility of the game, its minimization of all physical effort, used to make it stand for him as a unique and perfect example of the way life at Eastbourne could be reduced and belittled. In through his window, now opened wide at the bottom, would float the

sweet spring air—stirring his blood, telling him of the coming of the swallow and the cuckoo, and assuring him with a message unadulterate and enervating that somewhere over the bright modern roofs by which he was surrounded there was romance. The breath of the spring air could not lie. There could be no deception in the message it brought. Click would go the iron on the end of the club and he would see the small white ball dance over the grass, heralded on its way by voluble exclamations from Mr. Russell. “Hard cheese,” he would cry as it came to rest at last a little short of its goal. The tension of Chris’s spirit as the minutes passed would grow to a neurotic proportion. He would feel that it was imperative for him now, very now, to shatter the walls of his pasteboard prison. There must be some flaw in them somewhere, could he but find it. On one such occasion he crawled under a table and lay on the floor in a remote corner of his room, as if by so doing he could in some way slip through the dusty interstices of this obscure and unnoticed area of the chamber. Why not give up schoolmastering and persuade Adela to divorce him? She never would—Hinny would never countenance her doing that—no, for better or for worse he was caught. Yet they had not even got through the first year of their married life. He must make the best of it. Of course, he was not a very satisfactory husband from her point of view, and at the prompting of the last thought he went down the stairs, intending to go into the garden. The front door was open, however,

and the look of the street with the slanting rays of the setting sun upon it betrayed his resolution. He took his hat and stick and went out. As the latch of the small iron gate to the left of the motor-car entrance clicked to he noticed with an uncommon, unpredictable exultation that the snowdrops under the little bush were fully out. To him these were the most poignant of all early flowers, their ivory-white drooping petals so daintily streaked with faint green. He turned towards the open country and not towards the sea. When he reached the first real lane it was already dusk. He noticed the figure of a girl leading a bicycle a little in front of him, and as he passed her recognized that she was a kitchen maid of the school, whose grave face he had observed with appreciation when he had passed her walking by the side of Emily or had seen her shelling peas or taking the wash off the line. She was evidently surprised at meeting him now. "Good evening, sir!" she said. They walked for a little without speaking, he careful not to outpace her. He felt drawn to her as he might have been to a stray calf or filly or to any young thing. "You often go out for bicycle rides," he said, "when your work is over?" "Yes, sir," she answered. "I have a gentleman friend who lives here," and as though eager to escape from an embarrassing encounter she turned her bicycle up a cinder path in the direction of a small cottage that Chris had not noticed, as it was hidden partly by trees and partly by an old wooden shed covered with corrugated iron.



TWENTY-SEVEN



IF CHRIS could have followed the little kitchen maid up the dark path and witnessed her meeting with her lover that evening it would have done something towards shaking his confidence in the freedom of sex. Albert Hockey was a product of his age. He was the eldest son of a pig dealer, but living so near to Eastbourne he had adopted the light-hearted fickle habits that prevailed amongst the young men who stood about on the sea front on Sundays and on Saturday afternoons. The purpose of these youths was to make love to as many young girls as possible. Each summer girls came to the place in large store, like painted butterflies. The supply never failed. Dazzled by the lights, the laughter, entranced by the crude music, by the shows and entertainments, it seemed to these little shop assistants, these nursery maids and visiting daughters of tradespeople, that there was much to be gained in the race for pleasure. Every girl's mind was set upon winning boys. This was the ultimate test of pleasure. Albert had had many adventures. Standing at the corner near the tobacconist shop, or loitering along the front with a thin cane under his arm, he waited for his prey. From the first moment when he had seen the little kitchen maid walking down the street so shyly at the side of

Emily during the previous summer he had recognized her as a girl dedicated for his sport. They had talked together on a green seaside seat, the girl answering all his sallies with a high-pitched nervous laugh, her scented handkerchief pressed into a small ball in her plump square hand, that hand which had been hardened by the work she had done in her country home and softened by the number of dishes she had washed in the scullery of the school. Albert Hockey was equipped with a succession of ready utterances, but as he talked he never looked the girl's way, he rather appeared to be addressing the sea, or the bathing-machines in front of the sea, in and out of which, with towels on her arm, an elderly superintendent was moving, sun-baked as an Arab. Albert wore pointed shoes with fanciful leather decorations on them, bright socks, and a light suit he had bought at a cheap haberdasher's shop in a back street. His coat was open, exposing to the view of the passers-by a shirt adorned with green stripes. His thin hair with a curl over his forehead supported a cheap felt hat balanced on the back of his head. He smoked endless cigarettes. "It would be a bit of fun for you and I to wander under the cliff," he said. The girl laughed. "You look pretty. Where did you leave your Ma? My Missis will be wondering where I am. She'll be wondering more if you walk out with me. You think I got a Missis? Not I, I am waiting for a pretty wife like you. Then I'd soon be wanting a pram, eh? I'd look a regular picture walking along the parade behind a squalling kid," and he

laughed a weak trailing laugh, making the cigarette that was balanced on his under lip rise and fall. Presently he put out his hand and held the girl's wrists between his nicotine-coloured fingers. "What do you think I do?" he then asked.

"I am sure I don't know," the girl answered.

"Well, in the day I make my living by blowing the pipe."

"What pipe?"

"This pipe, sis," and he took a corncob he had just bought at the corner shop out of his pocket. They both laughed. The girl's excited giggles attracted the attention of a stout middle-aged woman who was passing. She gave them a glance of remote disapproval. "I wouldn't like to have that sitting on me if I was a cushion," he remarked, returning the woman's stare with a look of malapert challenge. "I bet she presses her husband out flat as a Sunday shirt. What's the old girl looking at anyway? I ain't lost any buttons, have I, nor you ain't lost your garters, have you?" At this moment a gramophone began jangling out its crude music from a balcony behind them. The nasal voice of the singer made audible through the medium of a pin seemed to be the very articulation of modernity as it was represented by the greedy shallow crowd that so shrilly pressed itself against the sea's silver margin. A never-ending stream of girls walked past them, girls eating sweets out of paper bags and looking back over their shoulders, girls with vaccination marks showing white on their sunburnt naked arms, girls

with inquisitive eyes, girls walking swiftly and silently on secret errands. "Let's go for a constitutional," he said. That "constitutional" had been the first of many.

Lucy Collet was not easy to win. She was flattered by the smart young man's attention, but she had been too simply brought up by her mother and father to be able to adapt herself easily to the free ways of the town. The idea of marriage was constantly in her head. She thought proudly of one day bringing back to her home this clever youth who was never at a loss for something to say.

It was in the early days of January that for the first time she had given herself to him completely. He had persuaded her to climb up with him into the hayloft above the pigsties of his home. His father had gone off with the railed cart on some expedition connected with his trade. His mother knew Bert's ways and never wanted to interfere. She had always spoilt him and that afternoon hardly took the trouble to look round at the ladder standing against the shed. She went about in the kitchen, preparing to scrub the floor, fetching the long-shaped brush, the hairs of which had almost been worked down to the wood, and the clout, damp and grey-coloured, and the great square piece of coarse yellow soap.

"But you do love me, you do love me, Bert?" whispered the girl as she gave herself to the young man. "Of course I lov'ee, I wouldn't have ye up along with me else," he answered. In the dim light of the cockle-loft he ruthlessly satisfied his lust upon

her. The mice retreated to their crevices, but the spiders during those exciting moments never ceased from their ingenious and delicate tasks. The quick breathing of the man and the stifled whispers and little cries of the girl were interrupted only by the sound of scrambling cloven hoofs below, while up through the cracks of the boarding rose the sickly stench of pigs.

It was the result of a series of such clandestine meetings that had brought Lucy with her bicycle to see her lover this spring evening. The young girl suspected that she was pregnant. She hoped that if she explained the situation to Albert he would be willing to marry her. She turned the corner, and leaving her bicycle against the wall of the house, knocked at the door. The pig dealer and his wife and son were at supper. They were eating tomatoes in vinegar. Albert was in his country clothes. He wore gaiters that were stained with pigwash and spotted with black oil from his motorcycle. "Why, 'tis Miss Collet," said the mother as she opened the door. "Come and take a chair," and she shook hands with the girl with a gesture of exaggerated politeness. "What can we do for you, young lady? It is a week or more since you have come our way. It's down with the young folks on the front you have been all this time." The father never raised his head, but went on eating with the concentrated attention of one of the animals he bred. From the moment of her entrance he had assumed a sullen look, as though he resented her presence, associating it with the in-

dolence and fecklessness of his son, against which he had long since ceased to protest.

Albert rose from his seat and removed some wash from a chair, placing the clothes on a table by the side of his mother's sewing-machine that had had its position there ever since he could remember. Lucy felt more and more nervous. She held her handkerchief tightly in her hand. "The evenings are lengthening out," she ventured. "I hope it will be fine at Easter for the holiday folk."

"What be they to us?" said the elder man rudely. "We be working-people."

"I thought Al might walk out a step with me as it was a fine evening," Lucy said. At these words his mother turned about and looked at her with a face hard and expressionless as a mask.

Once out of doors Albert began speaking. "Why did you come like this, Luce?" he grumbled. "I never ast you to come. Dad don't like my girls in kitchen at mealtimes." She walked with him into a field at the back of the shed. It was occupied by an old lame cow that was being kept there for the night before being driven the next morning to the slaughterhouse. In the half darkness it could be seen wandering up and down, too restless in its new surroundings to feed. At intervals it raised its head and there issued from its barren body long, lamentable bellows. When it heard the gate open it advanced towards the two. "What be the matter with you, you great bellowing b——?" the boy said, striking at the animal with a short stick he had picked up

in the yard. Lucy saw the white cow swing its heavy head away as though in anticipation of a blow, but it was out of reach and now moved off to where a leafless ash tree grew.

"Al, I am so frightened, I fear I be going to have a baby. Emily says she be sure I be ill that way." The young man was silent. "I don't know what to do—they will find out at the school and send me away, and I don't know where to go."

"Don't come with such tales to me," the young man answered; "I can't be any help to 'ee. Girls be always the same. It's 'love me, love me' one minute, and 'I have a baby coming' the next! I never did nothin' to you; 'tis like enough some other chap down at Eastbourne."

This unexpected accusation brought tears to Lucy's eyes. "But you did say you loved me, you talked of prams and all that—you wouldn't be against me now, Al, would you, and we who have walked out and all?"

"I wouldn't be for you and I wouldn't be against you, but if it's marriage you be after, you had best go to some other bloke. I bain't a marrying chap, and that's the short of it."

The doomed cow in the far corner of the field once again raised its head and out of that wire-fenced ground surrounded by ditches filled with black ooze there rose the plaint of an unrecorded and unsanctified despair.



TWENTY-EIGHT



CHRIS never had cared for the modern practice of married people's having separate beds. The look of such chaste chambers had always depressed him, and he had persuaded Adela, when they were buying their furniture, to purchase a bed large enough for two.

That night he was tired after his walk and went to sleep almost immediately. He waked to find it was still dark. Adela was sleeping peacefully at his side. In a sudden vagrant mood he converted the room at The Trossachs into a veritable temple of heathen indulgence and in those unthinking moments it seemed that for once he was able to transfer his spring madness to his wife. When their passion had at last reached its consummation, Chris with a masculine satisfaction such as he had seldom enjoyed in his relations with Adela turned on his pillow to sleep.

He awoke again at dawn. A blackbird was singing in the lilac by the gate, but the sun had not yet risen. He listened to the bird's liquid notes with idle delight. Perhaps, after all, he would be able to make something of his marriage. Adela's recent participation in his whims, the concurring response she had shown in the unpremeditated love-making, seemed to have melted the resentment he felt towards her.

In those moments of transient ecstasy the difference of their two temperaments seemed to have been cancelled. They had been as one, and he turned to look at her with a novel and lively interest. To his surprise he found she was awake also, but instead of answering when he leant to kiss her forehead she looked up at him with cold hostile eyes. "What is it, Adela?" he asked. "You are not angry with me because of our play?"

She remained silent for a moment and then said, "I am not angry, but I am thoroughly ashamed of you. I have never before understood what people meant when they use the word bestial, but I do understand now; you are bestial."

The conviction with which this utterance was made altered Chris's mood entirely. He rose sheepish and indignant, and it was not until he had returned from his cold bath that he recovered from a secret self-accusing sense of shame. They dressed in silence. Adela, as she searched for her hairpins on the neat dressing-table, thought to herself, "It is like this that wicked men treat women that they do not respect. I feel as if I had been humbled. I hate this kind of thing. I feel soiled."

Chris's meditations were different. Sitting on the edge of the bed, pulling on his socks, he thought, "Any excess is pardonable if it is dictated by desire. Why then should I feel ruffled? It must be just a matter of whom you are being happy with. If you abandon yourself to happiness with an unemancipated person you do wrong, whereas with another

it would be perfectly all right. Danger and trouble begin when there is a separation between the mind and the senses. With a cold woman you must be cold and with an initiated woman initiated. It's a matter of taste and psychology. To do things with certain people may very well be discreditable, while with others the same pastimes would be regarded as nothing, a mere tribute to an acknowledged subtlety. 'The golden rule is, there is no golden rule!' But no one likes to be accused of being bestial. What an odd word that is! I am sure it is the wrong word to use, because animals perform their actions unconsciously. They are always 'pure-minded,' because they have no minds. Consciousness in this is the pretty prerogative of man, and its heightened development goes far to compensate him for the ill usage he undergoes on other scores. I swear that lust carries in its mere existence its own justification. Adela's nature has been perverted by her upbringing. It is impossible to expect her mind and body to act freely and in unison. She is probably very unhappy now, especially because she knows that I know that I did rouse a response in her last night. How cross she looks! God, I must seem awful to her. I suppose Russell goes about his business with the utmost sobriety. Well, I must try to make it up."

He went across to where his wife was sitting. "I am sorry, Adela," he said. "I beg you to forgive me if I have offended you in any way."

"Offended me in any way?" she retorted. "You have outraged me in every way. I hate to be near

you." After this rebuff Chris felt thoroughly disaffected and they sat down to breakfast in silence.



TWENTY-NINE



THAT afternoon it was Chris's task to superintend matters in the school playing-fields. The boys were practising for the yearly sports which were to take place on the following Saturday. Chris found that his spirits revived under the influence of those afternoon hours. The field was a large one and spring was in the air. The beech trees and lime trees which bordered its hedges were already showing signs of life. Large white clouds followed each other over the tent of blue sky above. Some of the boys ran races; others collected about the high jump and contested with each other in their attempts to fling themselves above the thin bar supported on the pegs of the two posts. Chris walked from one centre of interest to the other, doing what he could to stimulate the eagerness of these young individuals who, with personalities as insistent as those of grown-up people, vied with each other in athletic prowess. The smaller boys, their faces wistful, dependent, watched the proceedings with wide-open eyes, and Chris exerted most of his energy in organizing

amusements for them. In the centre of the ground where in the summer was the cricket pitch the old white horse in large leather shoes was pulling a heavy mowing-machine backwards and forwards, sending a fountain of tender grass blades into the wide green-painted iron receptacle. Young human life held empire during these hours over the flat mould of the field, the evenness of which was disturbed here and there by infinitesimal little mounds made by earthworms, blind and dumb. At certain intervals the workman who drove the horse would empty the cut grass into a wheelbarrow and trundle it to a heap behind the pavilion, where it would remain throughout the year in a state of sweating decomposition. Whenever Chris approached the wheelbarrow with its heavy handles in its transit to and from the pavilion he would take up a handful of the tender grass. The smell of it fascinated him. How sweet and blameless it was, like the breath of daisies! Tiny grass blades, segmented scraps of green, would still be on his fingers as he would turn once more to his duties. He was always happy when left alone with the boys. The animation displayed by them, displayed in the movements of their supple, swift limbs, placated the restlessness of his spirit. However much their minds were being rendered harmless with little soporific wads of complacent teaching, their bodies, under the school system, were receiving adequate training. Perhaps it was true that if the body is cared for, the mind will look after itself. It might well be that mental

development was always dangerous to happiness and that the Rev. Hugh and his colleagues were doing a real service to these children in teaching them not to think.

A little before the end of the afternoon the headmaster himself appeared on the field. "They seem to me to be coming along very well," he remarked as he watched the end of a hundred yards race, the boys in their white shirts flinging themselves past the tape to come to an abrupt stop a few feet away. "It's a wonderful afternoon, the sunshine will help the gardens. Adela has come in for tea; perhaps you will join us when you are able."

"I wonder why Adela went over there *this* afternoon," thought Chris. "I suppose on account of my bad behaviour." He hated being caught like this. The headmaster's house always depressed him. Far away over the shiny roof of the pavilion, over the tops of trees in distant fields, he could see a line of hills with light green grass upon them. "I expect the plovers are beginning to nest," he thought.

When he entered the drawing-room Adela gave a formal acknowledgment of his appearance and continued her conversation about certain domestic difficulties she was having. "I can never get Amelia to take interest in the house," she was saying. "I could almost write my name in the dust on the table this morning, and yet, Heaven knows, we pay her well. She only seems to care about her afternoon's outing."

"My dear, they are all like that nowadays. Work

is the very last thing that occupies their thoughts."

"It isn't like it used to be," a certain Mrs. Romsey responded dolefully.

"Lucy, one of the kitchen maids," interjected Mrs. Hinny, "you remember the one, Adela, who comes from Sussex, used to be such a willing servant and now goes about with the most discontented face you ever saw. We treat them all too well, but what can we do now that they can get a situation anywhere they like? It is a real trouble to dear Hughy; he says they do nothing but eat butter. They won't touch margarine, and as for meat—why, a leg of Australian mutton is gone in a day. It's like giving food to wild animals."

"I think it would be extraordinary," Chris remarked, "if these young women did put enthusiasm into their work, for after all the houses are ours and not theirs."

The three women gave him a simultaneous glance full of injured resentment and then resumed their conversation under the leaves of the large hothouse flower that was upon a stand behind them. Mr. Hinny pretended he had not heard what had been said, but with a tight expression on his lips began turning over a copy of *Country Life* that had been left on a small Chinese table.

It was still light when Adela and Chris passed down the Avenue to their home. Chris felt rebellious. "I can't, I can't, go on living with these people," he thought, and for the first time he looked at his wife's figure with real distaste. "It is the atmosphere they

create. It poisons me. I can't breathe, and yet I can't persuade myself to become asphyxiated.

"I think I shall go for a short walk," he said aloud as soon as they had entered the small hall, and a few minutes later he was again in the Avenue, but this time with a sense of liberation.



THIRTY



CHRIS walked rapidly out of the town. He hoped before it got quite dark that he would be able to reach the distant fields he had seen from the sports ground. His mind was tormented. The falseness of his position was being brought home to him more and more sharply. He did not believe what these people believed, he did not think as they thought, he was playing a part. He must get out of it—but how get out of it? He couldn't just leave Adela with incompatibility as his only excuse. He had made his bed and he must lie in it. He was a fool. He should have had more insight. "Perhaps you only come to know a woman after you have lain with her, or tried to lie with her, or forced her to lie with you"—so his thought suggested with a cynical turn for veracity.

Everywhere flowers were beginning to come out in the hedges, dandelions, red dead nettle, colts-

foot. The roads were at last dry after the winter rains, and the smell of sap rose out of the ditches and out of the wide damp cultivated fields on the other side of the sprouting hedges. It was dark before he reached the hills that were as a matter of fact three miles distant from Eastbourne. But what he had come to hear he had heard, for as he had leant over a gate, with hedge parsley already coming up about its posts, he had caught upon the wind the wild querulous cry of the plovers. There they were, these birds he had always so much loved, flying with seemingly deliberate purpose for a distance, and then suddenly falling and whirling, their flight broken, fluttering in the air above his head like leaves, wilful and willess. He tried to fix the cry in his memory so that when he was at the school prize-giving or listening to Russell's ejaculations on his clock-golf lawn he would be able in reminiscence to revive it. In this cry there was a secret assurance. A planet that could evolve a sound so plaintive, so undisciplined, was not, could not be, commonplace. If it had produced petty and pretentious people like the Rev. Hugh it had also thrown into the air from its magical sod these plumed unstable prophets. No dove for him; these for him took the place of the holy culver descending from the open sky. He must remember that whenever ordinary, unilluminated hours clogged his being he could always find relief if he returned to nature and laid his naked breast upon the cold nakedness of the earth's clay.

He retraced his steps slowly, his mood at peace

as though he had been absolved. As he approached the corner of the school-yard he realized that he had still fifteen minutes before dinner. The idea suddenly came to him to go along the small footpath that led to the paddock. It was long since he had visited this old retreat of his. The field was empty. He walked slowly across it. As he approached the shed on its farther side he thought he heard a sound coming from it, low and muffled as from some one imprisoned. He went up to the door as softly as he could; the stick that held the latch had been removed and it was ajar. He lifted the ponderous ill-hinged timber a little so that he might enter. Its lower edge grated against the ground, but he soon had moved it sufficiently to allow him to pass in. The shed was absolutely dark, and he could see and hear nothing. Perhaps it had been his fancy after all, and he was about to leave the place when he was arrested by a slight rustling sound. He took a box of matches from his pocket and lit one. There in the farthest corner was the figure of the little kitchen maid with her head in her hands. "She has come here to cry," he thought. "Probably she has been scolded for looking sulky when with her shoulder dragged down by carrying an overweighted slop pail she met her mistress crossing the landing." He pulled the door to, keeping the match sheltered in his other hand. The girl had turned round, and just before the light went out he had a glimpse of her face, flushed and frightened. "What is it, why are you here? Why have you come to this shed?" he

asked while he busied himself with lighting another match. He felt ashamed when at last he was able to look into her face. It expressed nothing but consternation and alarm.

This little girl in her servant's clothes, escaping from the school's scullery in her lonely misery, roused in Chris an emotion of sentimental sympathy. How often had he wanted to fly away like this, to hide himself, to escape if only for a moment! "What is it, Lucy?" he said. "I am your friend. You can tell me. I shall never repeat anything."

She made no answer; only the sobs that had ceased at the first sound of his footsteps were now once more renewed. Chris stood silently by her side, and as he listened to her crying he thought, "It is not only crested plovers that can make articulate the earth's wild heart of trouble." He took her by the hand, and there in the darkness he set himself to comfort her. He spoke very softly, stroking her small round fingers. He longed to stay if but for a moment the waves of grief that were overwhelming her. How could anything so young, so inexperienced, be expected to get through life happily, prudently, without advice and fostering care? He himself, critical and aggressive, could not manage it. "Now, Lucy, tell me what it is that makes you unhappy. Sometimes when people tell other people their sorrows it makes them easier to bear. Have any of the other servants been unkind to you or are you unhappy in your work?"

"No! Thank you, sir."

"Well! Then it is Mrs. Hinny who has scolded you?"

"No, sir!"

"But it must be something. Have you had bad news from home?"

"No, sir," came the answer.

Chris felt hopeless; it seemed that with his best intentions he could not bridge the gap that separated him from this servant. "It's because I am one of the masters she can't confide in me. I suppose if I were my boot boy she'd tell him in a moment what the trouble is." He remembered how he had met her the evening before, going to visit a friend. "Ha! It's about a boy," he thought. "Has some boy friend of yours deserted you?" he asked. Again there was no answer. "I will light another match, and if you are smiling I will know I have guessed wrongly, and if you are still crying then I shall know I am right."

In the dim nimbus that the small light made around this child he saw the head still bowed in trouble. "How unhappiness suits her particular kind of innocent gravity," he thought. It was with genuine enthusiasm that, in the uncertain light, he took in the natural grace of the girl's person, her long eyelashes wet with tears drooping so softly on her cheeks, the fresh delicacy of her complexion. "Well, you did not smile. I know I guessed right, didn't I?" He caught her whispered affirmative. "Tell me then," he went on. "Has he been bad to you, has he spoken unkindly to you?"

Instead of answering his question she said again

in a whisper that he could only with the greatest difficulty hear, "I think I ought to be going now, sir, or Cook will be out looking for me."

This was not a prospect that was at all welcome to Chris, and he let her slip out of the shed without more to-do. "But remember," he added as she left, "not to be unhappy like this again, and remember if ever you want any help you can always count on me to do anything I can. I am often unhappy like you; so I know what it is."

She did not dare to express gratitude; she just said, "Thank you, sir," and went out into the night.

"As if I had been staying for a week-end at the school and had given her a tip of half a crown," he thought.



THIRTY-ONE



CHRIS and Adela spent the Easter holidays at Eastbourne, but the temporary freedom from school work did not make him any happier. Some secret combat was taking place between their two spirits, a contest deadly yet undeclared. They had no open quarrel, but the thoughts that they nurtured rendered every kind of communication between them formal. They had come to a point where neither would make concessions. Adela felt that by yielding

she would seem to sanction all that she disliked. Chris with a deep weariness of soul became each day more convinced that he had married a stupid and an unrewarding woman. He used to go out walking by himself, full of a restless melancholy. His environment irked him. He hated the Avenue, he hated his house. Even his study seemed alien to him. He had swallowed the bait, only the hook remained. The polished furniture clapped its hands at him. Go where he might he could find no ease or rest. If there had been a great kitchen as at Batemore with an enormous fireplace and an old cook, friendly and homely, wearing a wide white apron, he felt he might have been consoled; but here everything was so regulated, so spick and span. He was a stranger.

He would go to visit Miss Kennedy, and as their intimacy grew, little by little confided to her his troubles. "You mustn't be too exacting, too pedantic," she had said. "I think you must be a difficult person to live with. You must remember that all these interests and activities around which your wife's energies centre are important to her. It is through them that she finds expression, and if you could make her feel that you appreciate what she does and really share with her the satisfaction of living in a well-ordered home I believe you would gradually win her to a better understanding of your point of view. Remember, in differences of this kind the final responsibility rests upon the shoulders of the less limited person. After all she is able to throw herself with eagerness into the external life about

her, and that is a great protection. Serious dangers always come with ennui. As long as people are vitally concerned about something all is well, it doesn't after all matter much what. Simple people take pride in material possessions, in the little ceremonies of their particular locality, and get sustenance for their spirits thus. To others such preoccupations may seem dull and worthless, but if you examine them closely you will find that they also nurse prides not much more commendable; they aim for a more subtle and distinguished recognition, that is all. Everywhere people are trying to assert themselves, trying to show their power."

From the little garden where they were sitting they were able to look out upon the Channel. There it lay, as far as eye could see, flecked with tiny waves. "Didn't Matthew Arnold say that each one of us lived on an island separated from all others' by unplumbed seas?"

Chris's mood was not melted by her words that morning. They seemed insufficient, inadequate, empty. "Extraordinary," he thought, "how another's philosophic detachment can exacerbate one's trouble." His mind saw only the set regulated look on Adela's face as she had said, "This afternoon I am going to an at-home at General Macpherson's, and I think it would be nice if you came too." That word "nice"—how he hated it! "Nice" if he wore dress clothes, "nice" if he went with her to church, "nice" if they had a baby! He did not want a baby—what profit was there in the multiplication of

futile life? He would never be able to bring up any child they had in the way he liked. He wouldn't want him to get into the Harrow eleven!

He left the house unreconciled. Mary Kennedy was certainly sympathetic, but there was no disposition for peace in him. "We only listen to advice when we want to listen to it," he thought as he took the turning by the euonymus hedge bordering the street to the sea front. Before he had reached the parade he met Adela. She had come down to buy flowers and was carrying a bunch of narcissi in her hand, done up in green paper. Chris experienced a guilty sensation in this unexpected meeting, and this caused him to offer to accompany her on her other shopping errands. They went through the town together, Chris carrying the flowers. "I can never make out why florists always put paper round flowers. I think it spoils all the pleasure of buying them."

"They do it to keep them fresh, don't they?" she said in a tone that carried with it her complete indifference to his fretful opinion.

"I hate florists anyway," Chris continued. "They are like whoremongers making commercial profit out of beauty."

The word "whoremongers" seemed to project itself into the street like a rude oath. "Hush," said Adela, touching his elbow with a reproving gloved hand. A little farther along she stopped to speak to a man and woman who had just emerged from a stationery shop. The man wore long knickerbockers that, with no thought of economy for the expensive

cloth out of which they were made, went halfway down his calves. The woman's hair was grey and she wore glasses. Chris was introduced. He could not imagine what to say. He made a standardized comment upon the weather and then remained silent, waiting as elegantly as he knew how on the edge of the curb. With amazement he watched Adela's vivacity as she talked, and the man and woman seemed as eager as she. "How can they put so much vitality into their conversation?" he thought. "What is the reward of it? It is a kind of game. These people test their success in life by the adeptness with which they handle each social occasion, and the importance of life for them consists in such encounters."

"Tommy was quite peeved just now because I insisted upon having an ice cream at the Bristol, but we have to have refreshment for our too weak flesh as well as they, don't we, Ad? After all they have their horrid whiskeys and sodas always with them," and she began giving vent to a series of little mirthless laughs like the cluck-cluck of a hen whose thoughts are more occupied with worms than with the dawn. The man leant on his ash stick with an amused smile.

"Of course you should give her ice creams just whenever she wants them," Adela said in mock reproof, "but you would get better ones at Rigoli's, and they put choice red cherries on the top of them there."

"Yes, I know, but you have to sit out of doors

with the palm leaves flipping earwigs into your hair all the time."

Prattle, prattle, prattle, endless prattle! Adela left them at last, and the two went on together. As soon as she had finished her various commissions they turned up a side street towards their home. Chris's depression was heavier upon him than ever.



THIRTY-TWO



THE school commemoration took place each year at the end of June. It was a function that the boys and the masters looked forward to with equal eagerness. It gave Mr. Hinny an opportunity to show his academy off at its best. The lawns were green, the flowers all out in his gardens so that even nature under the care of the industrious Roberts conspired to contribute to his glory as with an affable manner he walked and talked with the various parents, his hands clasped behind his back. The under masters welcomed the occasion because it brought them relief from the monotony of their work: while it was an open secret amongst the boys that their lessons were during this particular week no longer considered as of primary importance. A kind of armistice was declared, and there was in the classrooms and

passages a holiday atmosphere with discipline relaxed.

When Chris woke on the morning of that summer's commemoration the sun was streaming into the bedroom. If it had not been for his wife's dressing-table its yellow rays would have reached even to the coverlet of the bed. The fact that Adela insisted on this piece of furniture blocking up the window had been a subject of dispute between them. It was necessary to have it there because of the light, she contended. "What was the use of a mirror if you could not see yourself in it?" To Chris it seemed another artificial barrier by which he was shut in. He did not like to have any obstruction between them and the open window, and when he came through the small iron gate near the lilac bush it irritated him to see the back of a large dressing-table, as if the chamber was the chamber of a prostitute.

That morning he again referred to his prejudice. "If the dressing-table were not there the sun would reach our bed," he remarked. Adela was quick to take up the challenge. "You are always dissatisfied, and yet actually you yourself are fond enough of comforts. You talk a lot of nonsense about living a free life under the sun and stars of heaven, but I notice you don't do it. You are all talk. Why don't you go and walk the roads if you want to so much? There are none of the advantages of a nice way of living that you don't yourself enjoy. Why, you wouldn't give up your coffee, your cigarettes, and

your tub for anything. Your flowery talk is just affectation. You are always making out you are superior to other people, but you aren't really a little bit. You pose all the time. You don't face reality. You are trying to be romantic, to be different."

These words irritated Chris more than he cared to show. It was not so much the bitterness with which they were spoken as the fact that secretly he half suspected them of being true. He did undoubtedly find relief for his predicament in words that were far removed from any practical action. "I find the life of this place immoral," he said irrelevantly.

"Immoral? It's you who are immoral," she resumed. "Everybody here is trying to do the best he can for the boys and for the country. It is only the most arrant crank that could say otherwise. It is people like you who spoil everything, always criticizing, never constructing. I don't know what you mean by words like 'immoral'—the boys, the masters, everybody here is clean-minded. I'd like to know any school that is better."

"They are altogether too clean-minded for my liking," he replied.

"I dare say," she responded sarcastically. "Can't you try for once to give up pretending you are some one so wonderful when in reality you are only a silly, discontented, conceited under master who does nothing but grouse all day?"

"I am a fool," he thought. "I ought never to get into these disputes. How is it that words like 'grouse' are so awful to me! It's my fault, I ought never to

talk." Disraeli's motto came to his mind: "Never complain, never explain." He ought never to forget that, but he always did and always would as long as he lived. His anger receded, and its place was taken by a mood of dreary self-depreciation. All confidence in himself and in his ideas seemed to vanish, and he went out to the bathroom distressed and humiliated.

The luncheon was the central affair of the day. It was held in the gymnasium, which was decorated with flags and flowers for the occasion. When Chris took his place between a colonel and the wife of a prosperous lawyer from Hull he was still unreconciled. It was as though all poetry had been excluded. The pink slices of salmon handed round he could not associate with the real fish that had been caught and carried to men's tables for centuries. This was a celebration, a feast, fish and viands and fruit set before men and women; yet he could not see it like that. The gay hats, the pretty frocks, the white collars, the murmur of voices shrill and incessant, the undercurrent of polite laughter, tormented him. Surely it was an aspect of life, but an aspect of life that he would gladly have spared from his experience. But why? He could not analyze his prejudice now. Perhaps wherever many people were collected together they created in self-defence an atmosphere denuded of imagination; perhaps this protracted senseless chatter was necessary as a protection. Awareness of life meant awareness of death, and that was not a thought to be welcomed in such

an assembly. These people were wise. If a practical workaday world was to be sustained poetry must be banished. Out of the corner of his eye he observed the colonel cut his portion of fish; he took large mouthfuls of the pink firm flesh, at intervals removing the bones from under his white moustache and putting them discreetly on the edge of his plate. His eyes were bloodshot and his lids red round the edges. "Capital food!" he said at last, half turning towards Chris, who immediately felt that it was incumbent upon him to say something else.

"Your boy is going to make a first-class batsman," he essayed. "He has done awfully well this year. He really plays with fine style."

"I'll have a coach for the youngster when I get him home," answered the colonel, eyeing his rosy offspring with complacence. "Practice is the thing, plenty of practice and a good 'pro,' and, by Jove! we'll have the boy playing for the county, what? Waiter, bring us along some more of that claret."

While he was wiping his mouth with his napkin, Chris's attention wandered to his other neighbour, a large good-natured woman with small screwed-up eyes. She was shaking a beringed finger at her son, who had just removed a large strawberry from under a number of others, causing a miniature avalanche of fruit to fall on to the white cloth. The boy, overcome with embarrassment, was picking the strawberries up by their stems and replacing them on the dish. "Naughty! naughty! naughty!" she simpered.

A blush spread over Rathborne's face to the very roots of his hair.



THIRTY-THREE



AT LAST the Rev. Hugh Hinny rose to say grace. There was a sound of shuffling feet and of chairs being pushed back, and then all suddenly a magical hush fell over the room. It was as if a flock of guinea fowl had been reduced to a momentary silence by the shadow of a hawk in the sky. The men, with their cigars in their hands, looked sheepishly at their plates; the women stood still, not daring to stroke down or rearrange the folds of their gowns. The half dozen words of thanks that were offered to the creator of the world passed over their heads and out of the high gymnasium windows held open from below by long thin cords fastened to neatly devised hooks. The flies and wasps alone took no notice of the incongruous lull, but continued to apply themselves with restless enterprise to their scavenging activities on the soiled plates. Immediately the devout words had ended, the room under its corrugated iron roof was once more alive with noise. Boys scrambled over forms, and Mr. Hinny, with an expression of authority graciously relaxed,

resumed his jocular sallies with Lady Courtney as he conducted her towards the door. Chris stood with his back to the flag-covered lockers containing the boys' white gym shoes and waited for the room to empty. The luncheon was over. The flowers in the vases had played their part, and yet they retained the same unnoticed beauty they had had when he had first seen the table with its glittering knives and forks and neatly folded napkins. "What a lot of washing up there will have to be," he thought. "I suppose the unfortunate Lucy will be dead tired before the day is over." Ever since their meeting in the shed, he had felt an especial interest in the little servant girl when he occasionally caught a glimpse of her.

A match had been arranged between the parents and the boys. Chris spent the afternoon watching the game. The elder men were in no way equal to their children, and their movements consisted for the most part in abrupt returns to the pavilion. The bails would fly off, and some elderly gentleman with his bat under his arm would retire with broad smiles from the cricket pitch; meanwhile the successful bowler, with his white flannel shirt rolled above his elbows, would stand talking nonchalantly to the umpire, the applause from the spectators gradually subsiding. Chris himself fell under the influence of the gaiety of the scene. It seemed in the bright sunshine, with the boys and girls munching chocolates as they walked together over the smooth grass, with the heavy roller left so solid and bright under the

copper beech in the corner, that such a thing as human misery could never exist in the world. No untoward event could surely invade the tranquillity of such a prospect. At any rate this cricket field was a protected area. It was only as he approached the copper urn to which he had come in order to fetch some tea for the lady next whom he was seated that he overheard some words spoken by Mrs. Hinny, suggesting that even on this sheltered lawn there might be heard echoes from levels of life that were not so privileged. "It is a great trouble and anxiety to me, I had suspected for some time and today she was found crying in the box room. She will have to do her work as usual and tonight I will tell Mr. Hinny, though I do not like to add anything further to his anxieties when he has so much that is important on his mind. I would never have imagined that the girl was so bad a character, and yet she is so self-willed that she will not even tell me who she has been with. As soon as she has finished her work I will order her up to her room and then pack her off home. This kind of thing is so bad for the school."

Chris continued to hold the china cup under the small tap so as to catch a few last drops of the brown liquid. Mrs. Hinny was talking to Mrs. Russell. He was sure that what she was saying concerned the unfortunate Lucy.

He carried the cup to the young mother on the green seat and at the same time offered her a plate of bread and butter. "I'll take two, if I may, Mr. Holbech, unless you will think me very greedy.

What is the name of the red-haired boy there—that one who has just thrown his cap to the umpire? He looks such a dear, such a dear. I'm sure he must be the same age as my boy Cecil. Well played, well played," she ejaculated with participating enthusiasm as the hard red ball went bouncing and rolling towards the opposite boundary.

"I think the one you mean is Johnson, Johnson tertius," said Chris, thinking to himself how he had once come upon this particular pupil laughing with glee at a mouse as it tried to drag the trap in which it had been caught, "a little nipper," back over the changing-room floor towards its hole. He felt worried. He had been a fool not to have been more insistent with the kitchen maid. If she had told him frankly of her plight he might have contrived some plan. It seemed awful to him to think of this young creature left to herself without a single understanding person with whom she could talk, left to drift towards disgrace without even the desperate initiative of the mouse. How formidable, how terrifying, must appear in her sight the banked-up undisputed authority of the conventional world as represented by the Rev. Hugh Hinny, an authority that she, to her shame, had so unwisely challenged! All the world must appear to be against her, the other servants, the townspeople, her own parents even. He longed to go back to the school and find her at her "washing up" and tell her that she was right and they were all wrong, every one of them. Perhaps, he thought, Rousseau was not far out after all,

and it is man who makes unhappiness. Certainly if the girl had only nature for her judge she would be happy enough, her young body concerned only with its own normal functioning, her mind under the influence of the blessed spell that falls upon women heavy with child.

"Do you read the works of Rousseau?" he suddenly asked his companion. "I? No, I never have time to read anything, what with all I have to do in the parish and the people that I have to see. And anyway I don't think I would read Rousseau. As far as I remember he wasn't a very desirable writer, was he?"

"No, perhaps he wasn't," Chris answered.



THIRTY-FOUR



IT WAS not till after the dinner was over that Mrs. Hinny found an opportunity to tell her husband about the condition of the kitchen maid. They had been entertaining four of the parents, and her pre-occupation as hostess had absorbed her so completely that she had given little thought to the domestic worry. There had been nothing, therefore, to prevent Mr. and Mrs. Dugdale and good Canon Gutteridge and his wife from enjoying their duck and green

peas, their salad and dessert. The Canon was always at his best when he found himself seated before a well-laid table. He indulged in his gift for reminiscences, referring with facetious patronage to the peculiarities of many a famous University figure. He told how when John Hale, the celebrated theologian, had been called upon to preach a sermon before Bishop Dove, he had absent-mindedly begun his discourse—and the Canon mimicked his droll intonation—with the stammered words, “O for the wings, for the wings of a dove.” The story was received by those at the table with a ripple of restrained well-bred laughter and Canon Gutteridge, with a countenance of controlled self-conscious good humour, bent himself a little forward in the direction of Mrs. Dugdale and offered her the silver receptacle which held the table salt.

It was not till after they had had their coffee on the terrace in front of the house that Mrs. Hinny managed to draw her husband away. The two walked down the path by the tennis lawn which led eventually to the rhododendron shrubbery. “I have rather a distressing piece of news to tell you,” she began.

“Well, dear, what is it?” said her husband. “You know it is always my wish to be consulted when anything is troubling you.”

“It is nothing, I am thankful to say, that concerns us directly. One of the maids has got herself into trouble.”

The juxtaposition of the words “maid” and

“trouble” was sufficient for the enlightenment of the Rev. Hugh. His mind at once jumped to the correct conclusion. “Tell me about it, dear. Is it any one of our own household who is responsible for it?”

“It is impossible to say, as I can get nothing but tears out of the girl. She is most obstinate and refuses to confide in me. She complains of feeling sick; so after she had finished her work I gave her permission to go to her room, where she now is. I think it would be well to write to her parents at once and have her taken away.”

“Which of the maids is it?” said the Rev. Hugh, his curiosity aroused as his mind envisaged for a moment the neat figure of Emily bringing him his morning cup of tea.

“It is Lucy Collet, the kitchen maid. Her father is a gamekeeper,” answered his wife.

“I will write to him at once,” said the clergyman. “My letter, if I put it into the pillar box tonight, will reach him tomorrow and he will be able to come and take the girl away the following morning. Won’t you walk on the path, my dear? I think the lawn is damp,” and he drew his wife onto the narrow gravel way where he himself was walking in his black evening shoes. “You do not consider it possible, I trust, that any of the under masters could have been instrumental in this piece of black-guardism?”

“It is not always easy to know,” Mrs. Hinny answered, embarrassed.

"I hope nothing of the kind has taken place in our school," the Rev. Hugh continued with a subdued and anxious sigh. "With the moral life of the country as it is we can never be certain that wickedness will not enter the most sheltered home."

They were now within a few steps of where the guests were seated, and the smooth modulated inflection of the Canon's voice came to them from out of the shadows of the wisteria. "You are perfectly right, Dugdale, they are, I think, people for whom one feels the greatest sympathy, especially when one considers their former state in life and the wide scope that has been theirs for doing good. Unfortunately with a modern financier such difficulties are liable to occur. My own ventures in the money market have not always been crowned with the success I could have wished for them. We must trust under Providence that as time goes on things will improve."

"Why, Canon, are you lamenting the loss of filthy lucre?" the voice of Mr. Hinny sounded, full of bantering jocularities as it came up from the silvered lawns. "Your thoughts should surely be on higher subjects on such a beautiful evening as this."

"Man cannot live on stipends alone," came back the answer, accompanied with a subdued and civil laugh.

"May I not offer you a little whiskey before you turn in?"

"Before I turn into what?" chuckled the clergy-

man good-humouredly. Everybody laughed; they felt that the Canon was in his best form.

Half an hour later Mr. Hinny was in his study sitting at his desk. He carefully selected a piece of writing-paper stamped with the school address.

"Dear Sir:" he wrote, "I am very sorry to have to inform you that your daughter Lucy has got herself into serious trouble. She is expecting a baby. I need hardly assure you that while she has been under our roof we have done all that we could possibly do for her physical and spiritual welfare. We do not know who it is who has done your daughter this great injury, and no persuasion on our part can overcome her secrecy. Under the circumstances I think it would be best for you to come here on Friday morning and take her home. The whole matter has been a very great sorrow to Mrs. Hinny and to myself. It is sad to see so young a woman straying from the paths of upright conduct, but we can only hope, in God's good time, she will be led to see the folly of her ways. I remain, Yours truly, Hugh Hinny."

The writing of the letter had not taken long. Indeed, hardly five minutes had elapsed before it was being dried by a rolling blotter which Mr. Hinny ran carefully from the bottom of the page to the top. He stamped other envelopes, coughed apologetically, looked round his study, passed his hand over his well-groomed hair, turned out the light, and made his way nimbly towards the front door. Once out in the night air he walked towards the pillar box at the

end of the Avenue. There was still a light in Chris's home, and he thought with regret that the marriage of the young man with his niece did not seem to be turning out quite as well as it might have. "They are still inexperienced—things may get better later on. Dangerous ideas often make dangerous difficulties. I dare say the boy will see his way more clearly in a year or two." Suddenly he stubbed his evening shoe against a stone and was jerked abruptly forward. He soon, however, regained his composure. "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God." The words came into his head without premeditation.



THIRTY-FIVE



MR. HINNY's complacent speculations as to the future of his niece's marriage might not have been so sanguine had he been an auditor a few minutes before to a conversation the two had had in their small drawing-room. Chris had mentioned to Adela the comments he had overheard Mrs. Hinny make to Mrs. Russell near the tea urn on the cricket field. "How could she order her to go on washing dishes when she was feeling so sick and unhappy?" he had said. "And then just to send her up to her room in

disgrace! It seems to me outrageous, it makes my blood boil."

"My aunt is far too kind a woman and far too good a woman to have acted in any way that was not for the best."

"But how can you say that, Adela? Can't you imagine the loneliness of that young girl—the feeling of absolute desolation she must be struggling against, with all the world waiting to cry out shame upon her?"

"She has brought it upon herself, hasn't she? I can't see the point of waxing sentimental over a servant girl who has wilfully gone wrong. You could never persuade me that she didn't know what she was up to. It is physically impossible. You can't eat your cake and have it too."

A dark and damaging rebellion stirred in Chris's soul, but he controlled himself, and moving his heavy chair a little, he put his hand on Adela's knee. "Listen, Adela," he said. "Can't you see that in the sight of God there is no greater sin than a lack of quick human response, of generous understanding?"

"You needn't begin lecturing me," she said. "You know I know what you are, and I also know what a true Christian woman my aunt is. You are nothing but a hypocrite in comparison."

Chris rose from his chair. "I hate you all," he said. "Deep in my heart I feel nothing but contempt for all of you. You are mean and petty. I despise you."

"Thank you. It is considerate of you to let me know your opinion of us."

"Well, I can't help for once speaking out; I have remained silent long enough."

"You have concealed your impassioned feelings sufficiently to accept my uncle's money."

"It has not been your uncle's money that has prevented me from breaking away. It's because of you that I have stayed here like a pet dog."

"Because of me?" she interrogated coldly, with a satirical lift of the eyebrows.

"Yes, because of you. If I had been by myself I would have gone off long ago. I didn't want to break up our home." His use of the well-worn expression humiliated him so that he hesitated for a moment, thrown off his balance as though he doubted the sincerity of what he was saying. Adela quickly sensed the uncertainty he was feeling.

"I wouldn't have thought breaking up a home would have troubled you much, and if you were honest you would never say it would. It's because you couldn't make a living except as a schoolmaster that you stay here. Anyhow you are too weak a man to do anything but talk. You needn't begin considering my feelings at this late date. I'll tell you now, and it is true, that I would be glad if I never saw you again. You make me feel tired," and she took up with feigned preoccupation a copy of *Vogue* that lay upon a table near her.

The last wave of love he was ever to feel for his wife disturbed his consciousness. He stood over her,

looking down upon the fair hair that so decoratively covered her head. "Adela," he said, "dear Adela, will you come away with me? We'll sell this house and I will try to get some other work."

"Haven't you finished with your melodrama yet?" she said, never lifting her eyes from the shining paper.

"No! I have not," he answered gravely. "Perhaps it has only just begun." He said nothing else. He left the room, went up to his study to fetch his flute, and a moment later she heard his steps in the hall and then the iron latch of the garden gate click to behind him.

Adela put down the paper she had been pretending to read, and holding her head high, sat with hands clasped, looking into the empty fireplace. She felt wronged, deeply wronged. The anger she had experienced seemed to increase rather than to diminish. It was impossible for her to rid her mind of it. How could he treat her as he had treated her and then fly to champion this servant? "He is a rotter—I wish I had never married him. I would have done far better to have waited till I found another man. It is these silly selfish ideas that have made him what he is. He has no real grasp upon life. Think of his marching off at this time of night!" With a sigh of genuine boredom she thought of his return, how she would be waked up to find him undressing and how they would come to some superficial reconciliation in the morning. "Well, anyway, there is the party at the Capel-Taylors' to amuse me next

week, and of course Joyce's wedding on Thursday. If he had wanted he could have shared my life and we would have been happy." A vision of Chris's head suddenly presented itself. She saw it as she had seen it in the first days of their friendship, grave and yet light, with the promise of a beauty that was never really fulfilled, his lips curled and sensitive. "His looks are spoilt by the clothes he wears. They always look as if they were tumbling off him. I must persuade him to dress better." Before she got into bed she went to the window. She pushed past the obstructing dressing-table with difficulty. "Perhaps I ought to have allowed him to move it," she thought, and immediately something melted in her and she longed to take her husband in her arms and beg him to let the past be forgotten. "I will when he comes back—I know I am weak, but I can't help it." Presently she knelt down on a warm mat and began to say her prayers as was her custom. A few moments later she was fast asleep on her side of the bed.



THIRTY-SIX



CHRIS walked rapidly down Sycamore Avenue. His mind was in a turmoil. Adela's words had stung him. A weak man, an incompetent man, a hypocrite—he

scarcely doubted the truth of these accusations. They all of them were probably justified, and yet not altogether justified surely, for still there remained deep in his consciousness the conviction that in his violent reaction against his present environment, at the very bottom of his nature there could have been found a fierce integrity almost religious in its intensity. He raised his head and looked at the stars. Still and immaculate they kept their positions in the firmament. It was to them he must hold. Let his soul be rocked in their cradle. If he could only see through and beyond the reality that so pestered him it would be exposed as the empty illusion that it was. From under the outstretched leaves of the sycamores he let his consciousness escape till it was caught up suspended and breathless amongst those far-away particles of light, amongst those appalling celestial conflagrations that regarded with impassive eyes the chimneys and roof-tops of the school. His meditations prompted him to turn his head in the direction of his prison. There it stood, dark and solid, under the drooping branches; only one lighted window shone out clear in the massive building. This single lighted window was like a watchman's lamp. Could it be the window of Adela's uncle? Was he at this very moment taking off his white collar and laying it carefully on the dressing-table? No, it must come from the servants' quarters. It was Lucy's window perhaps. This thought caused him to open the large gate and to step softly along the gravel drive near the lobelia border. The garden was

silent, its air full of the odour of half-closed flowers cooled with dew. He found a position from where he could look up at the window. It was open at the bottom. The silence suggested a room where a death had taken place, the body now left to itself with a corpse candle. A feeling of intense pity rose in his heart for the isolated unprotected girl who, he guessed, was lying in such misery behind the luminous blind. "I wish I could get up there to reassure her," he thought. He examined the position of the window. It was placed about five feet above the ivy-covered wall that separated the front drive from the boot shed and coal house yard. He tried the latch of the door which led into the small concrete inclosure upon which these outhouses opened. It gave to his pressure and he found himself within. He looked round furtively, fearful of detection. If he climbed on to the iron tank in the corner, he saw that he would be able to reach the tiled roof of one of the buildings and by this means get on to the wall. He went across on tiptoe, and lifting himself up, he crawled slowly over the hard tiles on hands and knees, eventually finding the shelter of the ivy. It was then to his consternation that he fancied he heard a movement in the house. He lay flat. Yes, some one was unlocking the front door. His presence had been detected. Suspicion had been aroused. Through the dusty bitter-smelling leaves he saw a figure emerge and walk briskly toward the gate—Hinny going to post a letter? He was still safe. He marked the retreating steps. He now was within

hearing of the window and there came to his ears the sound of smothered weeping, the sound of a weeping that never ceased, that was constant as breath. "Lucy," he called in a hushed voice. The noise stopped. She must have heard. "Lucy!" A figure became visible. It was the girl. She was in her nightgown and her hair was falling loose over her shoulders. "Lucy! it is your friend. I have come to talk with you." "Oh, sir!" the girl exclaimed in dismay. She looked down at him in bewilderment. He, meanwhile, with his elbows on the sill lifted himself into the room.

The small chamber had a melancholy appearance. A tin box was lying in the middle of the floor, half packed. The walls were bare except for a coloured print representing a hunting scene. Over the bed was a gas jet burning dimly, and on a cane-bottomed chair under it he saw a Bible and hymn book. In the centre of the chimney piece was an alarum-clock that continued to tick with vigorous emphasis, as though resolved at all costs to fulfill its dedicated task of registering the revolutions of the hours of sordid and thankless labour. Chris sat on the side of the bed. He held the hand of the servant and gently stroked it. The girl was now no longer crying; she appeared flushed and excited and kept looking about the room with an eager and grave pre-occupation.

"What are you searching for?" he asked.

"My shoes," she said, and bending down, she took from under the cover of the tin box two small black

indoor slippers. When once she had got her feet into them she seemed happier. He could see the white skin of her foot through one of the broken sides. He was touched by this quaint gesture in the direction of modesty and by the worn-out shoes that seemed to suggest such endless early morning reappearances in the kitchen, such endless sweeping with dust and pan, such endless hours of standing over sinks. But the girl herself was reassured by having them on. "I had better close the window and pull the blind right down," Chris said, "for Mr. Hinny has gone out, I think, to post a letter, and will be coming back again soon." She assented with a nod. The window was obdurate and refused to be budged, and Lucy came over to him and showed him that she had wedged it with a broken school pencil to prevent it from rattling.

"Lucy, I heard about your difficulties this afternoon. You mustn't worry. You haven't done anything really wrong. I promise you, I swear to you, that you need not be unhappy."

"They are going to send me home," she said. "I don't want to go home by myself to tell my mother."

It was the first time she had ever spoken out what was in her mind, and Chris felt that if her confidential mood continued he really might be able to help her. He longed to throw himself into the breach; longed, at whatever cost, to shelter this girl. It was as though at last he had found something to do, some action to take, that was wholly consistent with the secret mandate of his will. This impas-

sioned determination to correct if it were possible by his own efforts the clumsy outrage that the world was preparing to commit was distracted at the moment by the sound of the garden gate being quietly closed and softly treading steps approaching the house. "I suppose Mr. Hinny is walking so quietly because he doesn't want to disturb Canon Gutteridge's sleep." He looked at Lucy with a smile. She gave him no answering look, but said simply, "It is like the master's walk, there be rubber on his bottoms."

"But he must be wearing his evening shoes, silly." Lucy gave him a single tearful glance from under her lashes as if his cleverness had won some simple game. "Look here, Lucy," he said, "I am in disgrace like you, and I have made up my mind to leave this horrid house and run away tomorrow, and if you say you want to go home at once by yourself I think they would let you. Where is your home?"

"Near Arundel," she answered.

"Well, meet me at eleven o'clock at the station and we shall take the first train we can and I shall come with you and explain everything to your father and mother."

Chris could detect no sign of approval or disapproval. The head of the young girl remained impassive, looking down at the floor as a sulky Saxon madonna might have looked, Chris thought, after a visit from the angel Gabriel. Was it just stupidity that gave her face its religious repose? He could not tell. In reality her thoughts had already flown to her

home, the keeper's cottage in the woods, and she was in her mind's eye seeing the rows of beehives with the insects hovering in the slanting sunlight under the hazelnut hedge with its gap through which she had used to go to fetch water from the stream.

"Mistress won't never let me go like that," she whispered at last. "She said she was going to write a letter to Dad to fetch me along."

"But if you say you must go," said Chris, "she will give way."

"I would like terrible well to go along in your company," Lucy murmured. "It would make it all more better."

At this moment their conversation ceased, for they distinctly heard soft footsteps coming along the passage outside. They remained silent, looking at each other in alarmed suspense. Chris became conscious that the room, now that the window had been shut, gave out the same curious smell that his nurse Clare's room had used to have at Batemore Vicarage, a smell resembling the smell of apples closeted in a drawer. A moment later there sounded upon the door a sharp imperative knock.



THIRTY-SEVEN



THE Rev. Hugh Hinny, as he approached his gate on the return from posting his letter, had noticed, as Chris had done, the light in the servant's bedroom. He felt a secret satisfaction to think that by the divine order of things wrong-doing brought with it its own punishment. "The kitchen maid is without doubt full of sorrow for what she has done, and repentance with tears is a blessed thing." He congratulated himself upon the neat contrivance by which society was governed, unhappiness following so inevitably upon the heels of transgression. But as he looked at the window, standing on tiptoe to see more clearly over the fence, his complacence received a most unexpected shock because there came into his vision against the half-drawn blind the unmistakable shadow, not of a girl, but of a man. He saw him shake the window and heard the sound of its resistance come to him through the trees, and presently a second shadow appeared and then the sash and the telltale blind were both lowered. "The shameless hussy has her young man with her. This is what is happening in my own house. She must be little better than a common prostitute." The word "prostitute" when it came into his mind inflamed his righteous indignation. "She must be a thoroughly bad and degraded young woman. She has sullied my

home. I will go straight to her room and put an end once and for all to her immoral practices.”

Not wishing that the intruder should be warned of his presence outside, he opened the heavy gate as quietly as possible, letting its latch come to rest without noise. He then, treading as softly as he could, made his way towards the house. Such exposures were never distasteful to Mr. Hinny, who added to his other gifts the keen and calculating perspicacity of a detective. It was remarkable how quick he was to get on the track of anything that had to do with sexual irregularities. His pupils were often astonished at his power of discovering illicit relationships, and the school rows that used to follow such revelations were always prosecuted with astonishing subtlety and vigour. When such investigations were in progress an ominous hush would descend upon the establishment, the boys in the passages congregating in groups with much whispering, and the under masters who were in the secret passing into their different form rooms with sober and meditative countenances.

Mr. Hinny opened the front door and began mounting the stairs. The thought then came into his head that the intruder might well be a dangerous character, and he retraced his steps, selecting from his stand a stout thorn stick which he had brought back from Ireland on the occasion of his spending a holiday in that country. Holding this stick in his hand, and with two fingers removing his evening shoes, which was often a habit of his when he went

on his last rounds, he advanced softly down the uncarpeted passage that led to the sleeping-apartments of the servants. His abrupt knock was received by the inmates of the room with consternation.

"What shall us do?" whispered Lucy.

"Open it," Chris said.

"Best get under bed then," she ventured half doubtfully.

There was no time for considering the wisdom of the suggestion. Chris did not wish to bring further shame upon the girl and did not at all want himself to be discovered in so compromising a position; so down he went on his knees and as quietly as possible slid himself as near to the farther wall as he could. There he lay perfectly still, flat on his belly, amongst little fluffy balls of dust, with nothing to look at except the old castor that supported one of the four iron legs. He heard Lucy open the door and the voice of Mr. Hinny say sternly, "I wish to have a few words with you, Lucy Collet."

Presently two black silk socks with white lines running down the sides were added to Chris's range of vision. He had the same sensation as he used to have when playing hide and seek with his governess, the sensation of unexplained dread mixed with breathless suspended excitement.

The Rev. Hugh was taken aback to find the maid-servant's bedroom empty. The window was fast shut. The suspicion that he had been mistaken flitted through his mind, but if he had not been mistaken, and he was convinced he had not been, then there

was a man under the bed. A certain inhibition, we will not say of delicacy, prevented him from deliberately stooping down and looking under this article of furniture, and yet at the same time he certainly could not stand about, saying nothing. Already in these unfamiliar surroundings he was himself feeling ill at ease. It would not be very convenient for him to be found here at this time of night with the girl undressed except for her overcoat and shoes. He sat down on the cane chair by the bare wooden washstand. "This evening, Collet, I wrote to your father," he began, as if in this letter lay the explanation of his visit. "I wrote to him," he continued, "explaining your unfortunate condition. In the past I have always regarded you as a good and a conscientious young woman"—he coughed a little nervously—"a young woman who worked well and seemed to the household quiet and God-fearing. I am grieved to the depth of my heart to hear from Mrs. Hinny that it has been far otherwise and that while to all outward appearances you were fulfilling the tasks, however humble, that God had called upon you to perform, you were all the time with falsehood and deceit indulging to satiety that part of your nature that belongs to the beasts of the field." He paused and emitted two or three sighs. Lucy began to cry.

"Good heavens!" Chris thought, "how can she be taken in by all that talk, how perfectly awful!"

"I cannot stay here much longer," came into the mind of the Rev. Hugh. "I must bend down and

look under the bed." But in spite of her tears Lucy had placed herself in just such a position that his view would be obstructed even if he thus risked his dignity. "I am glad to see that you have the Bible on your chair; a contrite heart will ever be acceptable to the Lord. You have done a lasting harm to your good name. You have failed to fulfill the trust that was committed you, that is to say to carry your body spotless and undefiled until, if it had been willed so, you should have been joined to the man you loved in holy matrimony before the blessed altar. 'As ye sow, so shall ye reap,' but prayer is the true refuge of all sinners, their succour in time of trouble. It might be well, perhaps, Collet, if we knelt down together for a few moments."

Lucy was no longer in tears, and she now managed to kneel in such a way as to obscure more than ever the darkened recess over which she had cried herself to sleep on so many spring and summer nights.



THIRTY-EIGHT



BEFORE Mr. Hinny knelt down he placed his cudgel carefully against the washstand. He then arranged himself near the fireplace, from where he hoped he would be able to secure the swift oblique

glimpse he so much desired. He soon realized, however, that to do this he would have to bend his head almost to the floor. "Look down, we pray thee, Almighty God, on this thy poor erring daughter. If it is thy will, lighten her darkness. We know that thou art longsuffering and slow to anger and that where two or three . . ." The word "three" was scarcely out of his mouth than there issued from under the bed a most extraordinary sound. It was abrupt and very loud and prolonged like wind leaving a bagpipe. The Rev. Hugh was already in a somewhat nervous condition, and the inhuman noise obtruding itself so unexpectedly upon the silence of the room caused him to start to his feet and take two or three rapid steps towards the door.

The explanation of the sound was this. Chris had no sooner heard the praying begin than he became aware of an irresistible inclination to cough out some of the bedroom dust he had inhaled. With an effort he suppressed his insubordinate windpipe, but in doing so the trouble transferred itself to the back of his nose. As the last resource he held his breath, but against all his wishes Nature would have her way. The wind whose natural egress he was so arbitrarily retarding burst suddenly out, causing the prodigious explosion to which we have previously referred, an explosion which resounded through the room hoarse as a raven's croak, voluminous as a mule's braying, and hideous and uncanny as the whoop of a hyena who feels the thwack of a heavy stick across his sloping hind quarters. It is just pos-

sible that all might yet have been well and the Rev. Hugh would have taken himself off without making any further investigations (for to tell the truth he felt no very urgent call to summon from its retreat a creature capable of emitting so preposterous a hullo) had it not been that the glimpse Chris got of the clergyman's two black socks moving with such self-interested alacrity towards the bedroom door roused in him a fit of irrepressible laughter. Try as he might he could not control himself. He stuffed his handkerchief into his mouth, but without avail. The sounds that now issued from under the bed were no longer disguised. They were human, all too human, and the Rev. Hugh's emotion of alarm was rapidly succeeded by indignation. Never in his life before had he felt his dignity so challenged. To suspect the presence of a stranger in his house was bad enough, but to have made himself a laughing-stock before such a stranger, to be openly mocked by this intruder, was more than he could put up with. He walked back to the washstand, picked up his stick, and raising his other hand in the direction of Lucy, who stood huddled up in her overcoat near the wardrobe, he ordered the man to come forth. Chris, with the best intention, found it no easy matter to accede to this peremptory request. Kneeling was impossible, but he eventually managed to wriggle past the chamber pot towards the little dusty mat at the side of the bed. Meanwhile the Rev. Hugh had regained his habitual confidence, and with set clerical features awaited the emergence of the

audacious culprit in dignified silence. Judge of his amazement when no Jack-pudding of a townsman rose to his feet brushing his trousers, but the husband of his own niece! At that moment all the suppressed antipathy he had from the first felt for Chris pulsed through his blood. "This is most painful, most painful," he said with cold asperity. "Have you lost all self-respect? Would you be so kind as to leave this young woman's bedchamber and come downstairs where we can have a few words together?"

He was now entirely master of himself. His lips were closed as tight as a rat-trap. Before opening the bedroom door for Chris's exit, he stepped over to the gas and with grave deliberation turned it down, as it was his custom to do when he took his departure from any of the dormitories.

The two walked along the passage in silence. When they reached the landing Chris noticed the headmaster's evening shoes. He picked them up and followed him down the wide carpeted stairs. "These are yours, I think," he said when they reached the hall. Mr. Hinny put the shining footwear on to his feet, balancing himself by holding to the banister. "Would you come this way?" he said, leading Chris towards his study. When he entered the room he closed the door quietly behind them. "There are certain occasions in a man's life," he began, "when what he feels is far deeper than any words can express. This to me is one of these occasions. I have delegated to you great responsibilities in my school.

I have accepted you into my own family—and how have you repaid me? With wantonness and chambering. If I had found you misconducting yourself with one of your own class it would have been a great unhappiness to me, but that you should select to debauch the innocence of one of my servants is far more grievous. You have been joined by your marriage vows to a pure woman, and yet you have thought nothing of dishonouring the sacred tie by immoral intercourse with the lowest of the low. Corrupted as you are by modern ideas, you probably have lost the power of realizing your own degradation.”

At this point in his oratory he looked furtively at Chris, being anxious to divine the effect that his words were having. Chris was silent, his face impassive. “I beg you to consider what you are doing. It is by behaviour of this kind that homes are wrecked. If you are careless of your own good name I implore you, if you have in you a scrap of manliness, to think of Adela.” His voice here trembled. “My niece—your wife—and possibly at some future date the mother of your children! For her sake I do not propose to let this unfortunate affair go further. Knowledge of it will be kept to ourselves, but if I do this it is only right that you give me your word as an English gentleman that nothing of the kind will ever occur again while you are at this school. . . . It is little that I ask, but I owe it to my position to receive some assurance from you. I have written to this young woman’s father to have her

taken away from here the day after tomorrow. I am not unmindful of the power of the temptation that can be laid in the path of a young man by a loose and salacious female, but by prayer and clean thinking it is possible to keep one's soul and one's body unspotted. You have perhaps a certain dangerous irresponsibility in your nature, but also"—with sententious sentiment—"much has been given you: a virtuous wife, a happy home, and the wherewithal to live. Would you sacrifice this God's bounty for the enticements that a common strumpet has to offer? It must not be. It must not be. I beseech you, my good Holbech, to consider your parlous condition before God."

The Rev. Hugh's head was bent down upon the sleeve of his black coat, which itself rested upon a corner of the marble mantelpiece. The attitude was seemly, but at the same time admirably suited to an important emotional crisis. "I could never convey to you," he said in a low heartfelt tone, "what a painful mortification this evening has been to me—the discovery that one so dear, for you are dear to me, not only as the husband of my niece but for your own self, had fallen so far, had sunk so deep in the mire."

There was now a long silence. The clock continued its subdued expensive ticking. The moment had evidently arrived when Chris was expected to speak. He looked at the bookshelf, at the broad black back of a Crockford, at the shabby school-books on the top shelf. He looked at the painted oar suspended

along the farther wall, at a boy's new cricket bat standing in a corner with india rubber covering its handle, at the printed stationery on the desk before him, at the gold-tipped fountain pen lying against the rolling blotter. "Good God! I must speak soon," he thought.



THIRTY-NINE



MR. HINNY anticipated a complete capitulation on Chris's part. "This young man cannot fail to be touched by my generosity towards him, by the fact that I am prepared to shield him from exposure. This trouble will blow over and very possibly its result in the end will be for good. The important thing is that he shall give me this promise as to his future behaviour. I will get this undesirable woman out of the house the day after tomorrow, and that will be the first step towards a new life." He looked at Chris's face as he stood there grave and preoccupied. "It is wonderful," he mused, "the influence that a good man may have! Upstairs his behaviour was most objectionable, most objectionable, but now—"

Chris raised his head and began to speak. "There has been a misunderstanding," he said. "I must tell you . . ."

"Tell me what? How dare you talk of misunderstandings with the memory of what has occurred still fresh in our minds!" The Rev. Hugh was nettled. "I will not be put off with evasions."

"I have no wish to evade anything. I want to put the truth before you, that is all. I climbed up into the girl's room in order to . . ."

"Tut, tut! In order to what? You need say no more, young man. The servant is a bad character and you were found alone with her, under her bed in fact. You cannot possibly deny this. It is for you to offer me an apology and with God's help endeavour to alter your ways."

"It is my intention to alter my ways," Chris responded with rising irritation. "I have decided to leave the school—now at once."

"As you wish," answered the headmaster coldly. "But would you mind informing me how you propose to take care of my niece if you abandon your profession? You must realize that you have certain responsibilities to fulfill. Adela has been brought up in gentle surroundings, and it is your bounden duty to shelter and protect her."

"I have made up my mind to leave her," Chris answered.

This pronouncement was exceedingly unpleasant hearing to Mr. Hinny. "This is impossible. It is a challenge to society. I must tell you before you indulge further in so wilful a proposal that by law you can be compelled to support your wife."

"She shall have all the money I possess," Chris said.

"But, my dear Holbech, let me appeal to you as a friend and as an older man. You cannot act like this, so recklessly, on the impulse of a moment." He came across the room and laid his hand upon Chris's shoulder.

The latter looked up at him with ironic detachment. "My decision is the outcome of long consideration," he said.

"But this is madness, utter madness!" Mr. Hinny was now thoroughly alarmed. "I cannot permit you to do this thing."

Chris was still young enough to kick against the word "permit." "With or without permission," he said, "I am going, and what is more I wish to leave this house tonight, and not by myself, but with the young woman upstairs."

The Rev. Hugh was now no longer in control of his temper. "Your wilfulness has no limits," he said. "You corrupt my home with your blackguardism, and now you propose blazoning your filthy conduct abroad before the whole world. Take care, you are going too far, young man. However much you may be infatuated by your illicit passion, you must remember that as master of this house I am in a position to prevent your carrying out your plans."

"The girl is of mature age," Chris rejoined. "You have no right to hold her a prisoner. If she says she is willing to go with me, go with me she shall."

"And if I refuse to let her go?"

"Then," said Chris, "I will make a scene, I will carry her away by force."

"You must remember that I have only to telephone to bring the police into the house."

"That is true, but before the police arrived I would rouse such a commotion that this affair would become a wide newspaper scandal. Let me reason with you, Mr. Hinny. If you let me go quietly with the girl as I wish to do there will be no more bother. You can come upstairs with me and hear from her own lips her decision. If she prefers to wait for her father she shall do so, but if she would like to come away at once she shall do that. In that case it will make but a minor scandal, a scandal that will be borne by me and which as far as you are concerned will have blown over in a week's time."

This argument had its effect. "The dog returns to his vomit," said the Rev. Hugh with bitterness, but he consented to follow Chris back to Lucy's room.

They found her sitting forlornly on the cane-bottomed chair under the tiny flame of gas, her hands folded on her knees. "Mr. Holbech proposes to leave the house with you this evening, Collet. I would like to know what your wish is, either to stay here like a good girl till your father fetches you or to leave at once with him."

"I would like to leave at once with him, sir, if it's all the same to you."

Mr. Hinny was still inclined to reason with the two misguided people. "Will this conduct be hon-

ourable in you, Christopher Holbech, or maidenly in you, Lucy Collet?" he said in a controlled voice. When, however, he found that his appeal had little effect he once again, in order to restore his self-respect, resorted to invective. "You are both of you a disgrace to your family and to civilized society. Your iniquity will bring you to ruin. You are a shameless young woman bereft of all modesty, of all restraint; and you, sir," turning to Chris, "have neither morality nor scruple. I no longer wish to prevent your leaving my house. Indeed I welcome your departure. You have contaminated the school and my home with your obscenities. I will see to it through the help of my lawyer that you give my niece the most ample pecuniary remuneration in return for your having ruined her life. Yes, I use the word advisedly—ruined her life."

"But it is she who has ruined my life," Chris murmured under his breath.

"Hold your tongue!" the headmaster snapped out. "I will put up with no further impertinence from you. Out of my house you go, bag and baggage, taking your woman with you. I shall leave the front door open and in twenty minutes I trust I shall have seen the last of you. And under no possible circumstances will you cross my threshold again. You are an adulterer, and a seducer of the innocent."

"But down in your study you told me she was a common strumpet," Chris retorted.

"If she is one I have small doubt that it is you

who have made her so," the clergyman parried. "I order you out of my house."



FORTY



THE headmaster's footsteps were heard retreating along the passage. "Come on, Lucy," Chris said. "Be quick and slip on your clothes while I pack your box. We shall be free now in a few moments." He went to the wardrobe and took from it the dresses she possessed and folded them. He then packed her broken house-shoes, which she had already discarded. All her belongings, one after another, were assembled together, her underwear, her aprons, her handkerchiefs, her scent bottle, her washing flannel even. Nothing was forgotten. He bound a stout cord round the dented tin box and found he could carry it on his shoulders quite easily. "Now we are off. Downstairs!" he cried with free gaiety, and out of the room they went.

As they passed the bedroom of the other servants they saw there was a light under the door. They heard talking within. Evidently Emily and the cook had been awakened by the sounds of voices and movement so late in the night. When they reached the top landing they saw that Mrs. Hinny's bedroom

door was ajar. Chris was carrying the girl's box like a porter and with his hand on the banister had hardly taken a few careful steps down the stairs when there was the sound of hurried footfalls and Mrs. Hinny appeared in her dressing-gown, wearing upon her feet soft slippers of blue satin decorated with little balls of white fluff. "You can behave like this!" she said in a low voice of suppressed fury. "To Adela, to us, who have done so much for you? Oh! you are a bad wicked man. I must say it. A bad wicked man! I have never seen my husband so upset. It is sufficient to derange his mind, but I suppose that is nothing to you, deep as you are in your vice. Can't you see what a terrible thing you are doing, deserting your married wife for the sake of a kitchen maid? Oh! you are mad, mad and wicked. I hope God will punish you. I hope you will be dead soon, dead in the gutter where you belong."

Chris had stood listening to these words which came hissing out, one after the other, from lips which had always appeared to him placid and ineffectual. The last imprecation, however, seemed to free him from any further obligation, and he continued on his way down the dimly lighted staircase, with its bust of Lord Tennyson in the niche at the turning.

Once out in the Avenue Chris experienced an extraordinary sensation of relief. He passed The Trossachs. It was silent and unlighted. He had finished with playing a part. He wouldn't have to go to school, neither tomorrow nor the next day. "Ban,

Ban, Ca—Caliban, Has a new master, Get a new man.” “I beg your pardon, sir?” It was the voice of Lucy speaking. “I was only repeating a verse of a song,” he answered, but the question had for some obscure reason lessened his good spirits. “Perhaps Adela will really be distressed. Perhaps I *have* ruined her life.” For a single moment he seemed to get a wider insight into the consequences of his action. He saw this woman, who after all had once been dear to him, deserted, thrown upon her own resources. She did not really want parties. She wanted a lover, a companion who would be able to share with her all those clinging domestic interests through which she had been taught to find occupation. He wished he had not got angry with her, but had been able to explain better: “Never complain and never explain,” the words of the beaked opportunist fortified him again. He had taken the step. He must not weaken now. He must follow his destiny. What destiny? He did not know, he did not care. He must get away, he must find some place where he could breathe. These scandals always appeared much more formidable than they actually were. A kind of natural gravitation was always at work. A slight chasm in an ant’s nest soon filled up. For a few weeks or days even, his name would be on the lips of people, and then all would be forgotten. Why, tomorrow morning the work of the school would continue as if nothing had happened. Mr. Hinny would write to the scholastic agents to get a substitute for him. In the meantime his mark-book would be opened

by one of the other under masters. The papers of his form would soon be once more in order. No great harm would have been done. It was only Adela that need trouble him. She was possibly more defenceless than he knew. If only she had consented to come with him! He must write to her and explain everything, but she would never understand. Well, he could not have acted otherwise. He had got to the end of the tether. He could not go back. He had to go on. Sometimes a violent break was best, better than strangling and being strangled. Nothing could be worse than murdering love by little drops of poison day after day.

"Lucy," he said, "you are not too tired, are you? I will take you home tomorrow, but tonight we shall sleep in the house of a friend."

The girl followed him along the silent roads as a goat might follow its master. He was approaching at last Mary Kennedy's. He knocked at the door and almost immediately he heard her voice calling down from an upper window. "It is Chris, Mary. Would you let us in?"

A few minutes later they were safe and snug in the kitchen with the hostess heating some milk as she listened with eager attention to their adventures. Mansfield had come down also and stood near the door in his dressing-gown. He was vastly entertained by the narration. The bedroom scene especially amused him. "Oh, this is priceless, priceless," he kept repeating.

"What are you going to do now?" Mary asked

at last when Chris and she were alone together, Lucy having been safely put to bed.

"Well, I will take the girl home by the earliest possible train and get her through with the explanations with her people and then just go off and earn my bread as best I can. It will be easy as long as the summer lasts. It will be the winter that will be difficult. I am going to set myself to the task of going down the social scale instead of up, just as Uncle Hugh predicted I would."

"But what do you actually mean by earning your bread as best you can?"

"Oh, by casual manual labour or by picking and stealing."

Mary laughed appreciatively. "You certainly know how to deal with your life. I have often wondered why people don't just run away from unpleasant situations, and now I see they do sometimes."

"Could you let me have some paper so I can write a letter to Adela and to the bank, and could you let me have some money?"

"How much do you want?"

"As much as you have got in the house. I shall tell the bank to repay you."

"I happen to have quite a large sum—twenty-six pounds—would that do for you?"

"Yes, splendidly. All the rest of my money I am going to give to my wife."

"Oh! I wouldn't do that."

"I am going to, it will quiet my conscience and make me feel freer."



FORTY-ONE



IT WAS about four o'clock on the following afternoon that Chris and Lucy were approaching the keeper's cottage which was her home. They had left the tin box at the station to be called for later. The cottage was in the heart of a great Sussex wood. Lucy was happy to be walking again down the grassy track she knew so well, but at the same time her heart was fluttering with anxiety at the prospect of the approaching interview with her mother and father. Chris felt as if a great burden had fallen from his shoulders. He was light at heart. The track along which they walked was deeply overshadowed by hazel thickets, some of the twigs of which met over their heads. On both sides of them behind the bordering nut bushes they could see forest trees tall enough to hold their branches in the afternoon sunshine, in that sunshine which only reached the cart-wheel ruts where Chris and Lucy walked in shattered flickering patches. Butterflies danced before them, now flying far up above their heads, now settling on the water mint which, with stems of deep purple, showed itself amongst the damp grass of that sun-sheltered frog-haunted roadway.

At last they reached a small stone bridge under which ran a woodland stream. Chris pushed his way through the tangled mass of meadow sweet, pink

campion, and brambles, so that he could get to the water to drink. Under the darkened arch the tiny river rippled and played. There had been little rain, and the water was low, so that on each side of the stream under the arch there were dry banks of mud. Chris, when he noticed this, called to Lucy to follow him. "It would be amusing," he thought, "to rest for a little in so cool a retreat." They reached the centre of the small tunnel and sat down on a stranded log. "It's like being in a cellar, Lucy," he said.

"I used to come here Sundays," the girl remarked. "I used to catch fish in the water."

"What fish?" asked Chris, surprised that so small a flow could sustain them.

"Little fish, sir, the size of this," and she put out one of her fingers. "Dad cuts withies further up. 'Tis the same stream what we drink out of, only he don't flow straight. Oh, sir! Look at that mouse." They watched the small animal run past them on the stones opposite. "He be in a hurry," she said, laughing with delight.

Suddenly they heard the sound of footsteps above them. They remained silent. The steps passed over their heads. "How beautiful it is here!" thought Chris. He could see the water winding round the high damp banks to where it took a turn some twenty yards away into farther depths of the wood. Its soft, insistent, innocent murmur soothed his spirit. The broken sunlight through the leaves struck its bright moving surface with splintered shafts of

yellow. Large green ferns flourished on its bank, half concealed, unless Chris bent forward, by a herb robert plant growing out of the damp interstices of the masonry of the bridge.

His appreciation of the resting-place was soon disturbed by the sound of an animal pushing through the undergrowth where they had climbed down. A large retriever dog now appeared, and seeing two human beings sitting in so unusual a place, began furiously barking. There it stood in the centre of the stream, giving vent to its surprise. Chris grasped his stick, but this movement only excited the animal still further. Presently they heard the sound of a whistle, but the dog was in no mood to be called off. A man's voice then shouted to it, but still with no effect. "'Tis the squire hisself, 'tis the squire," said Lucy in an awestruck whisper as the calling continued.

"Well, anyway, this time I am not under a bed," said Chris. But the girl was too agitated to take notice of his remark.

"Fetch 'em out, fetch 'em out," came a voice from above. "Fetch 'em out there, Caesar."

Still the two in hiding remained silent, hoping that the dog would leave them now that his master had returned. They were disappointed. Presently they heard the sound of a stick beating at the brambles.

"He is coming down his own self. Oh, dear! Oh, dear! What shall us do? 'Twill bring more disgrace," Lucy whispered in consternation. "Dad do

always say that Squire Trotter be terrible humpy if anything do put en out."



FORTY-TWO



SQUIRE TROTTER was a man of simple tastes and solid deportment. In politics his opinions were liberal, and in this, as indeed in many other matters, he differed from his neighbours.

He was convinced that the world, and this world represented England, could be ordered in a satisfactory way if everybody in his own sphere of life did his duty. As a Justice of the Peace he let the weight of his disapproval fall heaviest on litigious farmers or grasping shopkeepers, whereas labourers, drunkards, and sturdy rogues he was inclined to treat with great lenience. The gypsies he always defended. Nothing annoyed him more than when he discovered that they had been disturbed in any of their traditional camping-grounds. He held that they had a right to let their nags graze on the wayside grass of the king's highway, and on an occasion when he found they had been shut out of an old chalk-pit he had taken energetic steps to have the obstructing barrier removed. In consequence his property, and it was a large one, became a recog-

nized refuge of these wanderers, and throughout the summer the lanes and coverts that surrounded his spacious eighteenth-century mansion were freely frequented by these wild men with their nut-brown women and their half-naked children. A constable who was new in the neighbourhood, wishing to curry favour, had once recounted to him how he had turned back a tramp from the footpath leading to his church. "I drove him back to the village," he said. This statement, far from winning the Squire's good will, brought down upon the head of the portly policeman in his blue cloth uniform a sharp reprimand. "Every Englishman has a right to use the public ways of his land," the Squire had remarked, giving the man a stern look, his right eyebrow raised a little. "In future you must take care not to overstep your duties in this way. Do you understand? I will not have it." The official touched his helmet with his forefinger and retired as rapidly as he could in the opposite direction, mopping his brow, and thinking to himself that in the land-owning class the reactions of man were as varied and contradictory as in other levels of life. The movements of Mr. Trotter's mind were always difficult to predict. He was a silent man. He would listen to every piece of village tittle-tattle that came his way and then, after he had had time to judge of the affair, would emerge from his study and march off down to his cottages to put the wrong right. He was hated by the propertied classes and very popular with the working-people. He was a great reader of Montaigne and an

enthusiastic fisher for eels, regularly putting out night lines in the lake behind his home and in the various cattle ponds of his estate. It seemed that these fish had some inexplicable fascination for him. He liked to eat them at breakfast and always hoped that one day he would come across one of their tribe in the damp grass of a buttercup meadow making its way to the sea. It happened that the Squire that morning had been more than usually successful in his favourite pastime and as he was returning to the manor, with a large basket full of these finned snakes, he had passed near his keeper's cottage. "I will just step in and give Mrs. Collet one or two," he thought. He crossed the stream and came through the gap in the hazelnut hedge, advancing along the garden path which Lucy was accustomed to use when fetching water. It was a cloudless morning, and every potato leaf was glistening in the early dew. The keeper and his wife were drinking a cup of tea in a little brick porch behind their cottage, which was pleasantly sheltered from the sun by a yellow honeysuckle. Under the curling sweet-smelling flowers they presented a perfect picture of pastoral felicity. "They are reading a letter, a letter from their pretty daughter Lucy," the Squire thought as with a cheerful salutation he came down the few brick steps that separated the garden from their sheltered retreat.

The keeper rose and touched his cap, while his wife in a spotless white apron hurried into the kitchen to fetch a chair for the Squire. "You have a

letter, I see," remarked John Trotter, wiping his large white forehead with a red silk handkerchief. "I trust it brings good news."

"It brings terrible bad news," the old woman answered as she came out with the chair. "'Tis from this here schoolmaster where Lucy be working to, and he do say that our child have got 'erself into trouble."

"Into what sort of trouble?" inquired the Squire.

"He do say she have erred from the ways of righteousness," the woman answered, "and that she be heavy with a baby."

"Not with *his* baby, I hope," rejoined the Squire with the brow of his right eye raised even higher than usual and concentrating his vision with dry humour upon a large white cat that was licking its fur under a peony plant growing at the top of the steps.

"He doesn't say that it bain't," the woman responded, "but he wants Jack to travel by train to fetch the maid home along."

"Might I look at the letter?" the Squire asked. It was handed to him, and he spread it out before him on one of the knees of his corduroy breeches. It proved to be just the kind of letter that the good man found most irritating. It brought with it the unmistakable flavour of the world he most disliked. He was repelled by the smugness of its tone. "This is no matter to worry about," he pronounced at last. "We will get the girl safe back home. These clergy are always beating up trouble, and schoolmaster

clergymen are the worst of all. They have probably been ill-treating Lucy, shutting her up and frightening her with their silly talk. I shall go myself to fetch her back tomorrow, and once we have her safe here," and he looked round at his forest trees standing so peacefully in the morning sun, "she'll be as happy as ever she was. We'll have no nonsense about it. The country is in need of children, and if the baby turns out to be a boy he will be useful to me. I'll set him to watching my lines."

The Squire's attitude seemed to put the minds of the old people completely at rest. The keeper disliked nothing so much as getting into a train, and the idea that the clergyman would welcome the Squire instead of himself the following morning was a profound relief to him. "He will get more than he be looking for," he said with a chuckle as after the departure of his master his wife was preparing with a stained kitchen knife to skin the eel that had been given her. "Squire Trotter be a good man, and no mistake."

Meanwhile John Trotter was advancing up his avenue. He detested nothing so much as the complacent tyranny that such a communication suggested—as though it took for granted that wherever the girl went she would be received with the same malevolent prejudice. "Not while I own an acre of English soil," he muttered, hitting the ground with his ash stick, "not as long as I own a good pond with a bagful of eels in it."



FORTY-THREE



THE Squire had made the necessary arrangements for the morrow's expedition. He was scarcely less fond of leaving his home than was the keeper. He decided to start early so as, if possible, to get back in time for dinner. He told his wife about his plan. "They have been up to some kind of roguery at that school," he said. "I'll go and look into it myself. That girl Lucy is a good girl, any one could see that who looked at her unless he was one of these new-fangled high churchmen who are a pest to the country. In their black coats they look like corbies. They would and they could peck out the eyes of innocence itself. I'd like to wring their necks. They'll be the damnation of the country."

"Yes, John, do go and get the girl back," said his wife. "We can look after her here. Old Mrs. Codwipple is an excellent midwife, and we can always get Dr. James to come over in half an hour. He says he likes to bring bastards into the world. I have often heard him say that one bastard is worth two of the others. They have more life in them, he thinks."

"Codwipple shall attend her, my dear, as if the baby were of my own begetting," said the Squire.

"I wish it might have been," said Mrs. Trotter, "and the nursery would not look so empty. I'll go

up to the attic and see if the cradle we used for Mary is still there."

"You are a good woman—a very exceptional and a very good woman," said the Squire, stepping back across the room to give his wife a kiss. "Where is Flora?" he asked. Flora was a young married woman of twenty-four who was staying a few days in the Manor. Her home was in Dorset, where she was mistress of one of the most historic houses in the county.

"She has gone out into the hay fields with Mary," Mrs. Trotter answered, "and they took their lunch with them."

"I will go and find them after luncheon," the Squire said. He reached the wide field in the mid-afternoon. His little daughter and his attractive guest were not to be found, so he lengthened his walk by passing through the great Blue Jay's Wood, and it was as he followed along the damp track of grass-grown leaf mould that he had been arrested by the insistent barking of his retriever. "What the devil has the dog found under the bridge?" he asked, as with his heavy stick he began beating down the brambles to make a better path.

Chris and Lucy first saw a heavy hobnailed boot feeling for a footing on the protruding root of an ash tree. Then a whole gaitered leg became visible, and at last the sturdy figure of the Squire himself was framed in the tunnel's opening. "Hello!" he said. "I am very sorry to have disturbed you. I had no idea that there was any one here." The dog had

stopped barking and was already beginning to push his way under the overhanging leaves farther upstream, his eager black back almost invisible. The Squire remained standing on the edge of the stream, the water trickling past the thick serviceable soles of his porpoise-hide country boots. "Why, Lucy, when did you get home? I didn't recognize you at first in the darkness," he said in a genial tone.

"I have not been home yet, sir!" the girl answered shyly. Chris scrambled to his feet and with bent shoulders began making his way out.

"You must introduce me to your friend, Lucy," said the Squire. There was something about Chris's look that was extremely agreeable to John Trotter. He liked him at once. "I'll be bound it is this young bachelor who is at the bottom of the business," he thought. The knowledge that it was now no longer necessary for him to travel to Eastbourne added to his good humour. "I found your father reading a letter from Mr. Hinny this morning, Lucy. It's a good thing you are back amongst us again. Other countries, other manners. You must give no heed to what the clergy say. I am the guardian of your world here.

"How do you like our woods, sir?" He addressed his remark to Chris, who by this time was back again on the track above the bridge.

"They are magnificent," Chris replied with genuine enthusiasm. "One seldom sees such timber nowadays."

"I am not one to have my trees cut about," the

Squire replied with ill-concealed satisfaction. "But tell me," he added, "how did you manage to come to rest under my bridge?"

"I promised this young lady that I would take her to her home," Chris answered. "I have been one of the schoolmasters at the school where she has been working."

"Have you, indeed?" commented the Squire. "You aren't so any longer, I suppose. Your ways too lively for them, eh?"

"I don't think Mr. Hinny cared much for my ways, but I left of my own free will."

"And what do you propose doing with yourself now you have kicked over the traces?"

"That would take a long time to explain," Chris answered, laughing.

"Why a long time to explain?"

"Because my purpose in life is to go in exactly the opposite direction from everybody else. All the world is going uphill and I am going down."

The ambiguity of these words, coupled with Chris's whole demeanour, a demeanour half serious and half lightning-like in its intensity, intrigued still further the Squire's curiosity. They now became aware of two figures coming to meet them along the woodland drove. "That's Mrs. Husting and my daughter," Mr. Trotter remarked. Caesar had seen the figures also and was already bounding towards them with impatient friendliness.

Slowly the two parties approached each other. To Chris in the afternoon light the girls appeared

to be under a glamour. They seemed to step with the sunshine through that world of green foliage. At one moment the sunlight through the leaves of a wide-spreading beech tree bough dappled their forms like a pair of fallow deer, at the next the tall wands of the nut trees gave an opening for golden spears of illumination. With gilt-winged flies flashing over his head, with the blue haze of the path quick with dancing gnats and midges, with wood arguses flitting past him on lovely errant journeys of delicate "other-world" labour, Chris, as he advanced to meet the two forms, experienced a strange trance-like sensation. It was as though he had stepped sheer out of his ordinary life and was abroad in some other plane, under an enchantment, perhaps, in a land where death had never trod, where girls and boys could always be young and always happy, where summer never turned to winter, and where happy lovers' meetings were never disturbed by anything worse than prick-eared foxes peering at them over green seed-dusty ferns.

Slowly his dreamy preoccupation drifted away. He was now aware of a feeling of present happiness that was very actual. Some fortunate association of his childhood had entire possession of his being. Unprompted by intelligence his heart began to beat violently. As he walked forward between the Squire and Lucy he searched for a clue. He had it. He had it not. Yes, he remembered. It was the way the elder girl was allowing her fingers to trail against the heads of the pink champions as she came towards

him. He was sure of it now. She was the Flora of his childhood!

The Squire was not a little surprised to watch their sudden recognition of each other. They stood talking eagerly for several minutes. Whenever the girl raised her eyes, blue and darkly shadowed, Chris received through his body the same dumb anguish of wistful longing that he had felt in the seaside lodging-house. It was exactly the same. It came back out of the years unaltered.

"Would you perhaps be able to dine with us to-night?" the Squire asked at last, remembering that it must already be late for his tea. "There will be plenty of time for you to leave Lucy happily settled with her parents."

Chris gladly acquiesced. "It is not only on account of my knowing Mrs. Husting," he thought. "He wants to examine me. He wants to discover whether I am responsible for Lucy's predicament. He is evidently a character. I shall have a chance of talking to Flora and may as well begin my wanderings with a good bellyful."

They parted at the opening in the wood in front of the keeper's cottage. A few minutes later Lucy was in the arms of her mother, and Chris was standing awkwardly near the small gate, wondering whether his presence was still necessary. "Oh, come in, sir!" said the good woman. "Make yourself at home. We'll soon have some victuals ready for 'ee. What's to your taste then? An eel what Squire caught in badger's pond last night—or a flap of

honey on bread? Now, Luce, you run upstairs and change your dress. We'll look after your gentleman."

"Good Lord! She at any rate thinks that I am the seducer of her daughter. I wish it were the custom always to feed such adventurers with eels and flaps of honey. Christ! how glad I am to be free!" he thought as Mrs. Collet bustled about, arranging for the meal.

In a few minutes the three were sitting round the kitchen table. The green sunshine was upon the geraniums on the window sill, but the room was cooled by the shade of the honeysuckle. A great cottage loaf rested on a round white plate opposite them. He cut a slice and spread it thick with honey. The taste of the yellow substance in its fragile comb entranced him. "Strange," he thought, "that the smell and taste of honey which I now enjoy is exactly the same as it was in classical times. It has come down the ages to this cottage, preserving its character pure and undefiled—undefiled! What a word that is! Well, I had better leave Lucy to explain."



FORTY-FOUR



A FEW hours later Chris was approaching the Manor House by a narrow footpath that ran across the park. The keeper and his wife had heard Lucy's story. "'Twas a good thing for we that thee was in that house along with our Luce," Mrs. Collet had said. "We give thanks to the Lord. 'Tis a hard matter sometimes for mortal souls to know what he be up to next, but 'tis working for good most times as busy as a honey bee, though the knowledge o't be often a-hid from our eyes. Luce do say you be stepping westward, but if you be minded to come back to Squire's woods—you be sure to step into keeper's cottage and ye'll find sommat for bite and sup."

"I'll come back for sure one day," he had said; "I shall want to see Lucy's baby next summer."

The girl and the two old people had gone out to the gate to see him off. Lucy's round little hand he raised to his lips. The girl drew back, blushing and laughing. "La! La!" cried the old mother. "An' I wish wi' all me heart thee had been the dad of this little 'un she carries."

"Tut! tut! Mother, don't 'ee say such things to the gentleman," cried Lucy as she took a step backwards into the small flower bed.

Chris noticed that her country boot had pressed down two pinks and a lobelia. "I wonder whether

the lobelia appreciates its fortune in growing in that little garden plot and not by the strip of grass near the front door of the school," he thought as with his hat in his hand he made his way across the open space in front of the cottage, stepping between innumerable coops set out there for chickens and ducks.

The soft evening air was still alive with insects. Wherever a ray of sun fell he could see these little dancing specks of life dashing back and forth. It was the same when he reached the park. "How strange," he thought, "that this infinitesimal and infinite life should be fulfilling itself throughout the length and breadth of England, that men and women, those wanton shadows of God, should pursue their various interests through such a shining mist of unobserved life." It was the same with the cattle. When milking-time was over and they were once more at large in the meadows grazing with horned heads lowered; everywhere above their backs, above their rough necks and switching tails, this bright caracole of midges continued on and on until the sun went down.

His meditations were interrupted by the approach of a servingman walking rapidly towards him along the drive. Something about his dress suggested that he was a chauffeur. Just before they met, Chris's attention had been caught by an object on the top of one of the broad chimneys of the house. "What the devil can that be?" he wondered. It was impossible from such a distance to make out what it

was. Did Squire Trotter's interests extend to storks as well as to eels? He stopped the man and pointed out to him what he was looking at.

"Oh! That is Mrs. Husting," the man said, shading his eyes with his hand. "It is one of her fancies—she's been up there for a couple of nights now. I have never knowed such a young lady. She has always some fresh prank in her head, in a manner of speaking. The Squire, he don't know what to make of this new item. He is nervous of her breaking her bones, but he can't say nay to her any more than the rest of us."

"Well, there is no accounting for individual taste," Chris remarked with a friendly smile.

"That's what I always say," the man answered. "We all have our programmes of life, the one as well as another, though it's not many that want to exchange a good night's rest in a feather-bed for a chimney-stack, but that's Mrs. Husting all over."

As Chris drew near to the terrace the figure on the chimney stood up and began waving a handkerchief. How this pretty gesture recalled to his mind the rapture of his childhood! And just as then he now felt a piercing thrill of romantic misgiving. He rang the bell, and a manservant opened the door. The hall smelt of horns and beeswax. Caesar appeared, wagging his tail, indicating as best as he was able that he had already accepted Chris as one of the household. The servant took Chris's hat and stick, and a moment later the Squire emerged through a wide-open door. He ushered him towards

the drawing-room. As he was about to enter, Chris noticed an uncommon snakeskin stretching across the wall. It was broad and obviously did not belong either to a grass snake or to an adder. "What snake is that?" he asked casually.

A genial smile spread over the Squire's visage. "It's the skin of the biggest eel I ever caught," he said. "I got him last year at the back of my boat house. He's a big feller, isn't he? 'Tis a pity he never got back to the Atlantic, but I had sport in catching him. I had a lobworm on my hook and he swallowed it whole. They won't always take the lobs. They like the red ones best. This is Mr. Holbech," he said, as Mrs. Trotter rose from her chair. She was dressed in a low-cut evening-gown, rich and sumptuous.

"Mr. Trotter has told me all about his finding you under the bridge. It must have been a very cool place to rest in. I have often wanted to see what it was like down there. On the other side that bridge has the initials of one of Mr. Trotter's ancestors cut on the keystone."

"That must be over the other entrance," Chris suggested, "or I am sure I should have noticed them."

"Where is Flora?" the Squire asked.

"She is busy making her bed, I expect. She'll be down soon," his wife answered.

"Mrs. Husting is going to Athens next week," the Squire explained. "She is leaving here tomorrow to meet her husband in London. I can't understand

why people want to go to these far-off places. I myself have never set foot out of England and don't intend to. All the travelling that is done from here is done by eels. These foreign countries are full of hedge thieves. They don't breed honest men; they can't do it. The soil is wrong."

Chris now heard steps on the stairs, and a moment later Flora Husting entered. With a spray of white jasmine in her frock she looked far younger than her age, scarcely eighteen. Her complexion was very delicate, as smooth and soft in texture as the petals of a rose newly opened, and her brown hair was cut close about her tilted head. She was dressed in white and she slipped into the room with the swift silent grace of a child. Her full red lips were sensitive and a little self-indulgent. Her personality affected Chris immediately. Indeed he was so moved by the sight of her that he suddenly felt ill. She gave him one of her free fugitive glances as they shook hands, and then did not look at him again till they were at the dinner table. The way she had of looking down, of looking in every direction except his, suggested a creature wayward, evasive, not to be caught. Her spirit set itself to escape any intimate scrutiny like a nuthatch fluttering from shadow to shadow on an apple tree.

"Mrs. Husting insists upon sleeping on one of my chimneys," the Squire remarked. "Though I agree that people should always be allowed to do what they want to do, it does seem to me a little

wilful when my home is full of beds eager to welcome so fair a burden."

"But you know well I do it for a special purpose," the girl said, laughing.

"She tells me she likes to sleep on the top of the chimney because when she is on the lawn the trees obscure half the sky, and she wants to be where she can feel the swing of the earth. Did you ever hear such nonsense?" the Squire said, transfixing Chris with a lifted eye of mock severity.

"I saw Mrs. Husting when I came on to the terrace," Chris said. "I thought at first she was a 'pelican in her piety.'"

She gave him a swift shy look and then covered her eyes with their long lashes. "Did you really?" she said with a merry laugh. "I wish I had more than myself to care for."

"If you rolled off in the middle of the night where would you fall?" he asked.

"On one side into a lead gutter and on the other into the goldfish pond—eventually." The dessert was now before them and she was eating cherries as greedily as a schoolgirl. She selected only the brighter red ones. For the first time in his life Chris appreciated the Elizabethan mania for associating this clean fresh fruit with the lips of lovely women. It was even charming to him to watch the way she spat out the stones.

Later in the evening they all four strolled down to the lake. They sat on a stable rug which the Squire fetched from an arbour. The starlight lay

still upon the water and upon the flat floating leaves. Chris presently took his flute from his pocket. "I will play you a jig," he said, and a moment later, over the dew-wet grass of the silent Sussex meadows, there sounded his favourite ditty. The sleepy herons in the tall elms heard it, the water rats in their slippery passages under the roots of the lakeside trees, the wide-awake barndoor owl, also, as he rested far up in the dark recesses of the plane tree on the lawn.

"Apples be ripe, and
Nuts be brown."

"That is wonderful," Flora Husting whispered. "I could follow that tune all over the world. I should never be tired if I heard it before me. I would just run on and on even if I went barefoot."

"If I could believe what you say I would come and play it to you in Dorset," he murmured.

"I shall be back there in the late autumn," she said enigmatically.

He looked at her, but although her face was turned towards him he could not see her expression. Mrs. Trotter felt cold, and the Squire had risen. Chris gathered the folds of Flora's cape about her shoulders. While he was occupied thus the girl suddenly seized his hand and bending her head in the shadow of her garment, gave his fingers a kiss. When he finally took his departure at the front door

he was still trembling although her lips had touched his skin as imperceptibly as the wing-feather of a swallow the surface of a pond.



FORTY-FIVE



ONCE outside the park gates, Chris found himself on an open road. The long day he had spent had not reduced his vigour. The rush of unthinking unconsidered emotion roused by that secret spontaneous sign had now resolved itself into a feeling of intense elation. "I could walk until morning," he thought, as with light step he advanced along the centre of the highway. The loneliness, the beauty of the night, filled him with exultation. Sometimes for minutes together he would loiter by a gate, drinking into his spirit the peace of the wide shadowy landscape. Each patient tree, each undemanding hedge-row, assured him of his release. The odour of dog roses blew against his face, the breath of cattle and cart horses was in the air. "I am free, free," he cried as, in imitation of Flora, reckless of thorns and nettles, he let his hand brush against the wayside hedge, each tiny grass and leaf of which was cool and moist. On he went again through the sweet sleeping country, nothing disturbing the silence except the

occasional sound of a farm dog barking, and the muffled tread of his own footfalls.

Presently he entered the street of a small village. To the right over a brick wall rose the tower of the church. He peered through the wooden lych gate at the gravestones dimly outlined. In imagination he envisaged all the human bones lying there so near to him—bones laid out so correctly, according to compass. He would be like that soon—but not yet, not yet! He wondered, if the dead could return, their skulls full of the perspective of eternity, whether they would make alteration in their manner of living. Surely having once had so awful a glimpse they would not be so easily gulled. They would ravish time with the furious intensity of a Michaelmas fly in a flower. They would not suffer one single moment to slip through their fingers. They would be intolerant of the drab and the commonplace. Any other attitude was sheer madness. Experience was everything, experience that was received through a highly developed and heightened consciousness. Nothing else mattered. To occupy one's energies with values that were trifling to be betrayed into wasting one's life for the sake of what was proved to give but transitory satisfaction—was there ever such madness? Worldly prosperity, worldly security, possessions—these things actually counted for nothing. The success of a man's life should be measured by what he was and not by what he had. Jesus had understood that, had re-

vealed that secret. It was a man's capacity for feeling that really counted, his capacity for seeing, for hearing, and for smelling. The first duty of man was to be aware that he was alive—not half aware, but really actually aware—to know himself as a living form moving over the surface of a swaying planet with moonlight and sunlight on his shoulder blades, a living form that could love and hate and become involved in a momentary and miraculous drama built upon mystery. He thought of his schoolroom at Eastbourne, of his slanting desk with his mark-book in its righthand corner near the bottle of red ink, of all that neatly organized life built up on illusions. School education set itself the task of imprisoning the mind. Its purpose was to train the mind to accommodate itself to the human plan, but not to God's plan, not to those gaps, irregular and engulfing, which yawned everywhere under one's regimented footsteps. At all events one must cultivate an imagination that at any moment of one's life could break through the surface and sink like a mole into another layer, another level, promising escape. It must always be possible to see a school mark-book with its regular lines as a symbol of man's writing craft developed from scratches on beech-tree bark, on papyrus, to see the square-handled ridiculous silver coffee spoons as made of metal dug from the earth, beaten and twisted by ingenious artisans. This tedious reality that hampered the swift leap of the human soul could be made to give way. That was the secret to remember. It ap-

peared impervious, invulnerable, but it was not so really. It only took on this formidable appearance because of its own weakness. It was at best but a counterfeit façade to hold back the feeble, the foolish, from entering into their rightful heritage.

Beyond the church rose a high grassy bank. It looked to Chris like an early earthwork, and he climbed on to it to inspect it more closely. When he reached the top of it he found that it overlooked a small garden with a flower border along the side of a lawn. A child's toy lay on the grass—a rocking-horse perhaps? At the end of the lawn was a house. The windows of one of its lower rooms were wide open, and within was the figure of a man packing a travelling-bag. He moved slowly about his task. He evidently was packing books, for he went from shelf to shelf and occasionally would return to the suitcase with a volume. Chris retraced his steps down the bank. He was never able to explain why it was that for the rest of his life this scene was impressed so vividly on his memory. It used to enter his head at the most unexpected moments and was always in some way associated with his meditations by the churchyard gate: the man in the room getting ready for his journey with the window open to the cool smells of the well-watered garden; the dim wan light of the lamp. Was that figure, moving in so leisurely a fashion, sometimes standing to turn a few pages of a book, also preparing for an escape?

He now followed a lane downhill, but his progress in this direction was stopped by a river. "This

must be the Arun," he thought. He went out a few steps on a wooden landing-stage. The water below him was flowing upstream, away from the sea. "It is a tidal river," he thought. Between the tall rushes that grew on both sides of the river and the actual water were dark banks of mud, black and sinister. These mud banks reached to the very roots of the rushes, reached up till they lay flat against the fibrous undergrowth of those motionless flags. "It looks," he thought, "as the upper reaches of the Nile must have looked on many a night." And suddenly there flashed before his eyes a vision of the proud body of Cleopatra outstretched on just such oozy margins, but in his mind the unparalleled naked body was the body of Flora. A shiver passed over him. "It's the river air," he thought; "it smells of the yellow fever. I will sleep tonight on the downs." And he turned into the dark lane till he once more reached the village, and passing through it, mounted slowly up a steep grassy hillside inclosed by hedges.



FORTY-SIX



CHRIS waked the next morning to find a large woolly-haired sheep-dog standing by him. He had

slept in a little alley of smooth turf that led into the centre of some gorse bushes. The dog looked at him without barking, his brown serious eyes just visible between tangled locks of hair that fell over his forehead. The sun was already up, and Chris saw the downs, larger and wilder than those of Dorset, spreading out before him. He got up in time to catch sight of a large flock of sheep disappearing along a high dusty track. The dog without looking back ran forward after them. Chris took the same road spotted with small heaps of cleanly dung and moistened with diminutive maps of dampness. The smell of the sheep, the fresh smell of the early morning, penetrated to the very marrow of his bones, and his spirits were still gay when he sat in the bar of a village tavern an hour later.

It took him five days to reach Dorset and two more to traverse the county.

On the evening of the eighth day he approached the town of Ilchester on the borders of Somerset. He hired a bed for the night at the Red Lion and refreshed himself at a beer-stained table in the bar with tea and eggs. He was tired, and long after his meal had been cleared away he remained sitting in the darkened room. One by one the villagers began to enter, labouring-men for the most part, smelling of sweat and horses. Chris was especially interested in an old man with a grey beard who sat silently in a corner by the large fireplace, empty now of fuel. "The gaffa be in fix," he heard the man say to a youth wearing a blue shirt. "He be

put to it and no mistake with they wide water meadows waiting to be mowed and so few to carry o't. Today in lower ground he were a-shaking his poll like a proper b——. He says, 'Charl, I am turked if I do know what to do with so much grass in meads, and so few to turn and carry of it.'” Chris pricked up his ears. If the farmer was short-handed there might be a chance for him.

The young man laughed. “Don't 'ee worry yourself, Granfer Charl, thy arms be strong as pair of flails, thee can toss and pitch as good as dree, if thee'd keep thy belly empty s'know. 'Tis what thee drinks that do hamper thee.”

“'Tisn't what I do drink that be the mischief. 'Tis what I don't drink. In old times Gaffa would give every hand a little barrel and them days we had sommat to put away, but now—darned if we don't have to trundle along up to public when we be minded to cure our thirsty.”

“'Twould do old Charl good to go dry a little same as Parson do preach on Zundays. He'd be more upstanding to give old Emmy what she do have a mind for. Old Charl do know what I do mean. Look, Locky, how he be grinning under his girt beard.”

The room was now full of people. Many of the labourers sat motionless as gods, silent and reserved. Others kept up a continual talk, a kind of heavy murmuring that any one standing as far off as Judge Jeffrey's gaol could have heard. Few of the men had taken any notice of Chris, who had re-

mained silent in his corner. "Where be thee going?" one of them said at last, laying the straw-made basket he had been carrying on to the brown table.

"I am on the road," Chris said.

"Well, I be damned if I'd 'a' knowed it," one of them remarked who was a little drunker than the rest. "Thee do look of another feather." This fellow in a capacious sandy-coloured coat now sat himself down on a wooden chair next to Chris. "What dost do then, mate, for living, or dost traipse from poorhouse to poorhouse like the rest?"

"I play the flute," Chris said.

The announcement was received with interest by his befuddled interlocutor. "Thee do play the flute, do 'ee? Give us a tune then, matey. We be all one under thatch, and old mother Pinny do like to hear music and welcome." The man rose unsteadily to his feet. "Gentlemen," he said in a loud drunken voice, "there be a lad here that be come to public who do know how to play a jig, and if ye all do bide 'steady a moment we'll call on en for a tune."

The confused murmur of voices ceased, and the attention of the company now became concentrated on Chris. "Play if ye be minded to play," said a voice from the back. "We do like a ditty as well as the rest o' 'em, but we don't want no hats a-passed round, nor caps neither, nor no little pussy-cat bags like Parson do collect his wages in on the Lord's day."

"Don't 'ee talk of pussy-cat bags, Bill Locky; they pussy-cat bags thee be always a-looking for won't

do thee no good. See how weak thy poor back be this evening; thee be always after they feathers, and 'twill be the death of 'ee, as all do know. I did see Locky creep under haycock with Nancy Wright, so slick as old Tom cat, when last load were carried. What were thee a-doing of behind thick pook? Now tell the company and don't be afeerd to speak out straight and clear."

An unexpected gravity came over the drunken face of the man at the back of the room. "Me and Nancy did sit in meadow to take the air, the same as Doctor Gordon did order I to do to cure cough in windpipe, and if any one do say 'twere for iniquity I be ready here, Billy Locky, to clip 'em one over the ear hole."

Now that it was apparent that the jesting was likely to lead to quarrelling, the other men turned to Chris in the hope that his playing on the flute would divert the intoxicated man's attention. "Don't thee take on now, Locky. We do know that thee be God-fearing, whether upon beast, on waggon, or behind hayrick, at top or below," and the conciliatory speaker looked humorously about the room. "'Tisn't maybe for thy own wish," the speaker continued, "but because thee do know that God ain't got no wall-eye like thick girt gelding's thee leads in putt. Now, Mister, if thee be minded, give us a tune."

Chris took his flute from his pocket. "Apples be ripe" he played and many of the other songs that he had learnt from old Baxter as a boy. After each

of them was finished the room resounded with applause.

"Thee be a handy man," one said.

"I be damned if 'a can't play through they little holes to some fashion," said another.

"I do wish thee would bide along be us, stranger," a third said.

"If there was work, I would," Chris replied.

"There be work and plenty. Old Charl was just a-speaking about his gaffa being short-handed in meadows. Step up to farm and tell en thee be a rare one wi' pick, and he'll give 'ee shillings come Saturday night glad and hearty."

"Where is the farm?" Chris asked.

"At t'other end of street, just where the road do take a turn opposite they big barton doors."

Chris rose from his chair. "I'll go and see if he will take me on," he said. "Don't thee hurry away, stranger," they called, but Chris had said good night to Mrs. Pinny and had stepped out of the door.



FORTY-SEVEN



FARMER GILES that evening had enjoyed a good supper. His wife, a little woman with a sharp nose and small black eyes, had almost finished washing

up. Phyllis, their younger daughter, had already brought the tea pot into the parlour, carefully opening the glass doors of the cupboard and depositing the large brown piece of china in its corner next to the receptacle for holding cheese. The long hours in the fields had made the farmer sleepy. He was sitting in an armchair the seat of which had sunk low through the constant weight of his heavy body. His face showed him to be a man of great good nature. It was a ripe face, ripe as a cider apple is ripe at the end of September. His gaiters and heavy boots he had taken off before sitting down at the table, and the feet of his grey socks were now covered with a pair of cross-stitch slippers that Phyllis had made for him the previous Christmas. His drowsy thoughts were occupied with his husbandry. In his mind's eye he saw his hay fields stretching away along the banks of the slow-moving river, with their grass still unmown.

“ ’Tis a tidy bite of hay I’ve got this year, but ’tis a business to get it in for what I can see of it.”

His son Edwin sat opposite him in another newer armchair, a cheaply upholstered one, such as is to be seen for sale in the furniture shops of all provincial towns. The boy was reading the newspaper with the casual attention of one who reads to pass the time; his legs were crossed and he kept swaying one foot backwards and forwards against the table hidden by a tasselled cloth.

“Ed, don’t keep jerking your foot,” came the

voice of the elder daughter, who was seated near the low window.

"Sorry, Nell," he said and re-arranged himself on the chair.

Nelly Giles was not thinking of her father's hay fields nor of what was in the newspaper. She was very unhappy, unhappy with the unhappiness of a young and beautiful woman who is without love. This love-melancholy had come upon her a year ago when Hal Hawkins, the only one of the neighbouring farmers who had at all attracted her, had sailed for Canada. Since that time she had been irked by her home life. It was not that her mother and father treated her unkindly. It was only that she pined for a fuller, more romantic existence. She was weary of the way each day, each week, each month, each year, followed the other in an endless, meaningless succession. She milked in the early morning, she milked in the afternoon, she fed the poultry, setting in place the coops on grass soiled and downtrodden by the sharp triangular claws of the domestic birds she tended. It was not sufficient, it was not her dream, and that summer she had experienced periods of unrelieved depression. Useless, worse than useless, it was to be beautiful if there were no one to love you. She was far cleverer than the young women who were her neighbours. She was impatient with the way they were content to pass the days decorating the church at Harvest Thanksgiving and at Christmas and jesting with the young farmers who dropped in at their houses as they came back

from market. She disliked these young men. None of them resembled Hal Hawkins, who had been so quiet in his manners and had taught her to read books, not the novels that everybody read, but good books. In such happy hours up in the small white bedroom that overlooked the yard she had fed her mind and imagination. She was often so tired that as she read by the light of a single candle her head would drop upon her pillow in sleep, so that in summertime the yellow-under-wings and daddy-long-legs that entered from the leafy cattle-smelling darkness outside would continue their fond blundering mesmerized flight over the bowed figure of a dreaming girl. She would always feel ashamed when this happened—going to the window when she waked, so that she might be refreshed by the cool night air upon her temples. "I must, I must have life!" she would cry. "I must, I must have love!" But the ivy tods that in a dark mantle muffled up the coping-stones on the roof of the dairy remained unresponsive. "I am foolish," she would cry. "Father is content, Mother is content, Phyllis and Ed are happy; I don't know why I should be like this." She would then undress and get into bed, but it would be a long time before sleep would soothe her restlessness. She would lie with her grey eyes open, looking at the little square of dim light which marked her window. "Is this what always happens," she thought, "to farmers' daughters? I wish I was some one else. I wish I was dead."

On this particular evening her nervous despond-

ency hung about her more heavily than ever. She had read that life-weariness was the worst calamity that could overtake a human being. She felt trapped, imprisoned. The sound of her brother's careless movement had nearly made her scream. She wanted her environment to break, the walls of the farmhouse to totter, the roof to rock. She would have welcomed the very judgment day, would have liked to see the great elms uprooted and the dead walk out from the graveyard, with the poultry rising up into the air over the chimneys. There was little Phyllis so sweetly helping her mother. She was at the moment bringing in the empty tea tray. Without turning her head she knew it. She was at that very instant trying to open the glass doors with her elbow to put the bread platter away. The exact repetition of that evening duty, however, was interrupted on this occasion because the flat round tray the child was holding had slipped from her hand, and Nelly looked round to see it bounce from the corner of a chair, and with the movement of a hoop, make a wide circle about the room, coming to rest with an absolute revolving precision upon the head of Tony the spaniel, asleep in his corner. With a yelp of apprehension the animal slipped away under the table, where he remained with blinking eyes and wagging tail, half ashamed of himself. The whole incident had been observed by the farmer. The fact that the tray had rolled with such sureness to that particular spot, and the look of panic expressed by the dog's swiftly retreating back,

struck the good man as excessively comic. The room echoed with his laughter. With mouth wide open and head back he emitted inarticulate bursts of sound which more nearly resembled the bellowing of an ox than the hilarity of man. Edwin laughed also as, lifting the corner of the tablecloth, he tried to coax the dog from its retreat. Phyllis, seeing that no harm had come from her mishap, joined in the general amusement. Only Nelly was silent. "Why can't I laugh like everybody else?" she wondered. "Dad always makes such a great noise."

At that moment a knock was heard upon the back door.



FORTY-EIGHT



FARMER GILES regarded the young man whom Phyllis conducted into the room with interest. He was a little suspicious of him as belonging to some level of society of which he had no previous knowledge, and yet at the same time he liked the look of him and in his present difficulties welcomed his appearance.

Before even old Charl or Locky or any of the other labourers were up, Chris was out in the rick yard waiting for instructions. He sat on the shaft of a wagon at the door of an open shed, watching

the chickens at their unending employment of looking for food. They ran to and fro, scratching on the midden heaps, now and again snatching up some invisible particle with a swift movement of the head. A large cock with a beautiful scarlet comb fluttered his dusty wings at intervals and emitted a shrill cock-a-doodle-do. Tony lay at the door of his kennel with drowsy attention. Blackbirds settled at intervals upon the wall opposite, only a moment later to disappear as, with a rapid lift of the tail, they dived down amongst the currant bushes in the kitchen garden on the other side.

From that first day Chris proved himself a good workman. He laboured with the impetuous enthusiasm of a novice. The hard physical exercise was extremely agreeable to him. It was impossible to tire him. Even when his legs and arms were stiff with the unusual exertion he never flagged. Wherever he was in the field the work proceeded at a truly astonishing rate. The men liked him. His eager energy proved infectious, and before a week had passed the farmer had come to look upon his presence as lucky.

For the first time in his life Chris came to welcome the return of each Sunday. In the past he had always hated this day, but now the sound of the church bells and the look of the village street soothed him, the very ducks on the pond taking to themselves a sedate sanctified appearance with their white feathers unwetted. Everything suggested a long summer day of complete rest. He used to rise

early, and with cheese and bread and a hard-boiled egg in his pocket, go for an all-day walk in the surrounding county. On one Sunday he wandered for miles along the banks of the slowly-moving river. Some of the fields had already been cut and carried, others lay before him with their wealth of sorrel and buttercups up to the hedges. Some again had cattle grazing in them. Chris would sit on the river's bank and watch the great calm beasts, red and brindled and spotted, stand knee-deep in the mud, their soiled tails switching at the flies. In the deeper pools of the river, down through the dark under water, he would observe the fat chub moving amongst the weeds in undisturbed content. His mind was at peace. The vigorous nature of his week-day work and his freedom from any responsibility put him entirely at ease. "This is what I wanted," he said to himself as he stood one evening in the centre of a narrow bridle bridge with the sunshine slanting through the tall willows. The sun lay upon the stone coping, bright and yellow, revealing the intimate details of each fern and weed; the very cow pats broken and dusty in the narrow way between the walls seemed transfigured by it. To be alive, that was sufficient; merely to breathe, merely to be able to watch the dance of the flies over the water! "For me at any rate the secret of living consists in escaping. Only when I am engaged in the most elementary of human activities do I become truly conscious." He turned his head and looked at the sun. There it was, round and golden, still well

above the horizon, and as he glanced up at it he had a vision of the grass-grown earth stretched out in all directions with the generations of men storing fodder for their cattle, storing grain for their own bellies, and always with labour, with sweat. Here all the complicated exactions of town civilization were unrecognized, were nonexistent. Perhaps for certain natures to fulfill themselves it was necessary to accept the gift of breath at the lowest possible terms. It cleared one's head like drinking water fresh from a cool well. One's spirit was no longer cloyed, covered with the dust that rose from carpeted interiors. He could hear a cuckoo calling from a spinney across a stagnant dyke. The reiterated note, so pure in its utterance, so unspiritual, so mockingly aloof, entranced him. It was under a compulsion similar to that which propelled the cuckoo with its long tail across these elder hedges that men also lived. They also had their crops to fill. With a whimsical smile he remembered that the feckless bird was at pains to shirk its domestic responsibilities. What was wise for this bird was doubtless in certain cases wise for man also. The preoccupied little hedge sparrow had her reward surely in expending so much industrious fidelity upon her four blue eggs, but so also had this pert wanderer flying so wantonly from one tree to another. "Cuckoo! cuckoo! cuckoo!" came its cry. How present it seemed, how it belonged to the actual moment, to the here and now of each creature who heard it. Everybody, every living thing, heard it, the boys

and girls laughing and quarrelling in the hedges, Charles's wall-eyed gelding, the dog in the farm-yard. Its jocund, clear, amoral voice was only inaudible to the dead, to those who lay still, like rows of carefully placed ninepins around each grey church tower. He was aware as he sat there in the cooling sunshine that his meditations had in some way disturbed his peace of mind. A kingfisher darted suddenly from under the cool masonry. It shot upstream like a bejewelled dagger cast by an unseen hand. The bird came to rest on the branch of an alder with dry winter rushes still hanging from its lower twigs. Yet even this distraction did not divert Chris's mind from some uncertain pre-occupation. He passed his recent meditations in review. Ah, now he knew what it was! The thought of the boys and girls in the hedges and the memory of the glimpses he had had of Nelly Giles! He saw her bring a napkin-covered basket into the fields for her father. He saw her carrying the milk into the dairy—pouring the liquid out from one shining can into another shining can, that liquid which was not so white as was her own forearm, nor doubtless as her own sweet body under her fresh print frock.



FORTY-NINE



As CHRIS was re-entering the village that Sunday afternoon a black dog flew out at him. He had always been nervous of ill-tempered dogs, and rather than go down the narrow lane it guarded he got over a stile into an orchard which would lead him to the high road. He heard the animal barking at the stile, but it did not follow him into the shadowed field. He tried to open the gate at the opposite end of the enclosure, but to his chagrin found that it was padlocked. He now turned towards an ash tree which seemed to offer an exit if he lifted himself over the hedge by holding to its branches. He was preparing to do this when he saw framed in an opening of the tree the figure of Nelly, walking with her hat in her hand along the raised bank of the river in the direction from which he had come. She was walking in a swift impetuous way with her head bowed. "She must have got off going to the evening service," he thought, and immediately he made up his mind to follow her.

There were some people in the turnpike who were trying to drive a sow back to a cottage yard from which it had escaped by pushing through some wire netting inefficiently pegged to the ground.

"Ge on wi' 'ee, thee great grunter," a boy called as he pelted the animal with small green apples.

"Don't 'ee drive en after I!" a girl tittered. "Look see how the beastie do scrabble! Goo! how his trotters do splash the dirt—his hairs be mired all up the back side o' en."

"Steady, ole woman, steady," called the voice of a man who was standing in the ditch ready to turn the pig's head into the gap through which it had originally escaped.

Chris waited by the ash tree till the voices had subsided and the people had moved off, and then climbing over the hedge began walking soberly along the bank of the river as if he were for the first time setting out on an evening walk.

The girl had disappeared. He improved his pace, but when he reached the spot where the river turned she was still nowhere to be seen. Yes, there she was, going along the hedge which led to the copse where the cuckoo had been calling. He went over the field diagonally, keeping himself hidden. On her side of the hedge he knew the dyke could be crossed by a rough plank that had been thrown over it. Where he was there was no such convenience. He looked up and down the small canal. Its banks were grown high with feathery reeds, but there was not even a fallen willow to help him. Either he must get into the girl's field or he must jump. The latter course seemed to him best. He selected a flat place for his take-off and with a good run jumped as far as he could. He landed on the sloping muddy bank opposite, but before he could get a firm balance one of his feet had slipped back into the water. The

splash attracted the girl's attention. She had already crossed the dyke and from where she stood could see what was happening. "Why, what are you doing?" she said when she came up to him. "Nobody can jump it. It's far too broad. I have seen my brother, Ed, try often, but he always balks in the end. Look, your leg is drenched. Take off your boot and I'll see if I can clean your sock in the grass." She spoke so naturally and was so much at her ease that Chris wondered why he had felt afraid of talking to her freely before.

They sat down on the bank and he took off his heavy boots. The girl plucked a handful of grass and water mint and tried to free the wool of his sock from the black slimy mud that clung to it. She wasn't very successful. "Take it off and I will wash it," she said, laughing. He did as he was told, and in her light honeysuckle-coloured frock she slipped down the bank and began rinsing the wool in the water. To avoid getting her dress wet she carefully lifted it to her bended knees. Chris looked down at her, happy at being in her presence and by no means oblivious of the grace of her attitude, or of the attractiveness of her lightly clad body. She was soon at his side again, her wrists wet with ditch-water. "I wouldn't put it on until it is dry," she said.

"Oh! I shall never die by catching cold," he answered. A yellow horsefly settled on his ankle. He brushed it off with his hand.

"How white your foot is," she remarked. "I think

it so wonderful that anything so delicately made can do so much. Think of all your work in the fields," she said with a smile.

Her observation was just the kind calculated to please Chris. Not only was it in keeping with the natural bent of his own mind, but it flattered him. "This young woman isn't just an ordinary farmer's daughter," he thought.

"Yes!" he assented. "I have often wondered myself about the way our feet with their unnoticed ten toes have to carry us on such varied business. They carry us up to attics and down to cellars, through meadows and along the sand of the seashore, to churches, to taverns, to graveyards, and best of all in the direction that leads us to our loves."

"It is sad," she said, "when we have no loves for them to lead us to."

This pronouncement, made with such simple seriousness, Chris found encouraging. Already as they had sat together his unregenerate intention had been if possible to make love to this beautiful creature at his side. His impulse was so strong that he could hardly resist there and then putting his arm about her and pulling her backwards to give her a kiss. The proximity of her body to his in those deserted meadows seemed irresistible. His whole being flowed towards her. They were young, a girl and boy, and the restrictions that were imposed by convention seemed as nothing. What if they had never talked together for any length of time? The sight of her little nipples like hidden acorns under her frock,

the extraordinary loveliness of the head so adroitly poised upon her neck, the enchanting mystery of her body's secrets, bewildered him with a tender and greedy madness.

"Who are you really?" she suddenly asked with a swift look of ironic intimacy. "Anybody could see you aren't a tramp. Your voice alone proves that."

"If I tell you, you will never tell any one else?" he said.

"Never any one else," she promised, and there on the green bank he related his story. She listened in silence. Once only did she interject a remark, and that was to ask if he had not had a letter from Adela after his departure.

"No," he said, "but I haven't let any one know yet where I am, and I gave as my address a friend's house in London."

"You ought to write and see if he has any letter—for how do you know she is not very unhappy?"

"I don't know," he answered.



"LET us walk on a little farther," Chris ventured at last. The girl rose from the grass. Chris for a long time had realized that it was impossible for

him to see any young girl get up without his casting a fleeting amorous glance at the movement of her frock. "Fortunate," he would think, "were the garments so white and spotless that held such intimate and unspeakably desirable flesh."

They walked through the meadow. The hay had been carried a few days after Chris's first arrival, and already the aftermath was springing up fresh and green. The sun had gone down and the dew was falling. Away over the roofs of the village a full moon was visible. "Let us go into the wood," he said. They scrambled through a gap. A long trailing bramble hooked itself into the girl's dress, and Chris with trembling fingers disentangled it, Nelly standing motionless, watching for the moment of her deliverance, her head half turned. "She is beautiful," he thought when, freeing her at last, he looked up at her concerned face. They walked down a small footpath. Foxgloves in all their pixy glamour stood in conspiracy on both sides of the way. He took her hand. She made no protest, and thus they went forward to the farther side of the spinney where the oak trees and beech trees gave place to a grove of hazels, the brown wands of which had been cut close to the ground in the early part of the year. The woodmen had stacked their faggots in heaps in readiness for the winter hauling, and between these heaps the bracken had grown up with great luxuriance, completely concealing the bluebells with their fading seeds.

"Let us rest," he said. His companion made no

demur. He took off his rough labourer's coat, the same that he had bought on his way through Southampton, and spread it on the springing ferns. She sat down in silence. Without a word spoken he drew her to him and kissed her. The fact that she did not reject his love, did not draw away, filled him with a sense of compassionate triumph as though he who had been but a moment before a forlorn wanderer upon the pavements of the world had suddenly, beyond all expectations, found himself admitted into a gentle and sheltered garden. Flora was forgotten. "Darling, darling Eleanor," he said.

The girl raised her delicate face to be kissed. "Now I know," and she spoke with tremulous intensity. "It was this that I have been wanting."

He never forgot those words uttered with so eager a conviction. In them he found revealed what he had for a long time suspected, the cruelty of the conventional world in its dealings with the most quivering side of a girl's life. "It was this that I have been wanting." For a moment these words stirred within him feelings far remote from his insistent purpose on the bracken couch. Deep down in his nature he felt moving an almost religious determination to combat in every possible way, by guile and by example, the mean illiberal doctrines recognized by society as necessary for the stability of property. What right had these people to inflict upon the youth of the land their narrow and indecent prejudices? Eleanor was crying, gently, very gently. He laid her back in the green foliage, cover-

ing her head with kisses. They were alone and under the instruction of nature clung to each other with a hundred swiftly condoned caresses. The rays of the moon in soft silent levels of sylph light illuminated the darkness of the trees behind them. It fell upon the heaped-up faggots and upon groups of flowers. It made radiant with a poetic wanness the girl's figure, as, happy at last, she rested on the crushed fronds of the rude-smelling ferns. Suddenly the silent tryst was broken by a burst of music. A nightingale had begun to sing in the lower hedge. The bird sang as if it were throwing its whole life into a moment's passionate expression of the earth's proud joys and of the earth's proud bitter sadness. Its voice rose and trembled and rose again. It hovered far up in the moonlight. It trembled through the stationary flower heads. It wandered over the white meadows and above the dark trees of hedgerow and wood into the clear night air. And its ecstatic trilling touched chords deeper far than any human-made values or standards. It told of secrets that discounted all human adjudgments, secrets below the plane of ordinary morality and ordinary life, secrets that were absolute and could not be explained away, were society organized never so cleverly.

They clasped each other's hands. "Do you know," said Chris, "as I was coming back from my walk I heard a cuckoo calling from this very wood. And as I listened to it I thought of you, and experienced

a sensation of misery to think that we might never in all our lives have play together."

"How curious that you should have thought of me! I didn't know you had noticed me."

"Of course I noticed you from that first night; when I came into the room I thought to myself, 'Except for one she is the most beautiful girl I have ever seen.' You were sitting by the window very pale and very absent, but I never dared to think you would ever come to care for me, still less be as sweet to me as you have been tonight."

"Who was that other?" she asked. Chris was silent. "I have often thought of you at night in my bedroom when I was sitting up reading," she continued, no answer coming to her question.

"Do you read very late?" Chris asked.

"Yes," she said, "sometimes to one or two o'clock."

"Then it is really your candle that I can see from my room like a tiny planet shining over the fruit trees behind the houses in the street. It shines between the leaves far away across those silent gardens, and I have often thought it must belong to the farm and now I feel sure it shines from your bed."

"Tonight you put a candle on your window sill and we can see," she said.



FIFTY-ONE



THE haymaking gave place to weeks of harvesting. Chris still felt a resistance to writing to Raymond for his letters. He wanted long months to intervene before he became involved in any of the perplexities that might have arisen from his abrupt departure from the school. He deliberately put his past life out of his mind and sank himself in his work with old Charl and Locky and Sam Stroud and the rest of the labourers. Throughout August the weather remained fine. The sun each morning rose round and clear over Corton downs, descending when the last waggon had left the field behind the low flat horizon of Sedgemoor. The sweltering heat of the fields nurtured Chris. He liked to see the tall yellow stalks of the corn standing so straight in the undergrowth of poppies and bindweed. The earth was dry and crumbling, and over its surface in the stubble, where the machine had passed, frogs, field mice, grasshoppers, butterflies, followed their natural ways, completely divorced from the interests of the men who, with white shirt sleeves exposed, moved to and fro.

Chris preserved his reputation as a competent farm hand, and his presence in any part of the field invariably hastened the labouring activities. "Thee can handle a pick as well and better than rest of

us," old Charl said one noon when the men with their baskets of bread and cheese and their small barrels of drink were resting under an oak tree near the hedge. "Where be thee's whome, then? Where did thee come from, so spry like Jack-o'-lantern?" for this was the name that the men had given him. "Jacky do know where he did bide, but he bain't a-going to tell we. 'Tis an old trouble that did cause en to shift, and that's what I do know. 'Tis the same sweetmeats that thick Locky be after each sunshine day, as busy as a wopsy, that did start en on's travels. Women be thy torment—now, speak out straight now. We be all thy mates here along, and we do all know what they pretties do hide so careful under apron. It bain't fresh eggs, it bain't tomatoes, nor it bain't a pat of butter neither, like old Mother Giles do flap up so tidy with a milk cow on top of 'em. What be it then—'tis a cutty's nest—and that's what be, a cutty's nest so soft and warm what we all are minded to search en out, and some be more nimble at thick bird's-nesting than others. Locky that do drink so quiet amongst the herbage there, he do know his way about—Locky do know."

"Thee be too full of talk and I bain't a-listening to all they foolish words that thee do put out, nor do Jack-o'-lantern neither. Thee'd best keep thy tattle to thy own self and not keep on wi' thee's folly out on gron when Gaffa's corn be a-wasting. I be going to bring thick waggon up to line and

we'll start again—we'll soon topple they cocks on to the back of en."

Chris watched the man walk away from under the shade of the wide-spreading oak. His heavy boots crushed down on the stubble with the slow deliberation of a labourer who has learned the folly of rapid movement. The horses were standing under another tree a little lower down the hedge. Their heams were glittering in the sun which fell also in circles of yellow light upon their flanks and upon the shafts of the wagon polished brown with the sweat of previous summers. The great animals raised their obedient heads as the man drew near, jangling the rusty chains that were attached to the heavy harness and swishing their tails. Chris rose also and was soon followed by the other men. The great oak tree was deserted. All through the afternoon its shadowed mossy base remained cool as a cider cellar while outside in the golden corn and golden sunshine the men moved backwards and forwards. A wood pigeon presently settled in its topmost branches, and for some minutes before, with a fluttering and beating of its wings against the small irregular leaves, it flew farther, it added its complacent cooing to the drowsy atmosphere of the cloudless afternoon.

Chris met Eleanor Giles each Sunday evening in the little copse. Sometimes they managed to arrange an assignation in the week as well, but this was seldom, because Nelly had much to do in the home and dairy. As their intimacy grew Chris came more

and more to appreciate the quality of Nelly's nature, so exceptional, so different from anything that one would expect to find in a girl living an isolated provincial life in the country. She had her own ideas on many matters, and Chris was continually surprised by the thoughtful and independent temper of her mind. He himself was by no means unaware of the anxieties and difficulties that might easily arise out of the relationship, and it was with a sense of genuine shame that he heard her say one August evening, "Chris, I want to have a child by you."

"But, Nelly dear," he said, "it would be impossible. Think of the unhappiness that it would bring to your people."

"It would bring the greatest happiness to me," she said. "I must live my own life. Father would get over it after the first shock, and Mother also when the child was actually in the cradle. I want a child so much, and don't you see how I would then have a token of our love that no one could steal from me?"

Chris felt that there had been something superficial in the way he had played lightly with her love. A sober look came into his face. This girl, so uninfluenced by the sly previsions of the group to which she belonged, was appealing to him to satisfy the most primitive desire that troubles the heart of woman. He felt that he had found some one whose nature was far bolder and deeper than his own. It had been his ambition to sink down to a level of

life where natural values only need be considered—and behold, he was caught hesitating in a halfway area where he could take his wanton pleasures and yet deny the primal purpose of all breathing things. “I am an ‘afternoon man,’ and that is the truth,” he thought, with a crooked smile at his exposed weakness. This woman, so natural, so intense, so tender, and so strong, mortified him. She seemed as she sat there with quivering lips and shining eyes to belong to those fortunate ones who between long vineyard rows in ancient times had gods for their lovers. “She is truly pure,” he thought. “She is fit to give birth to a hero, and yet she has for a paramour a shallow, shameless product of a corrupt and sterile age.”



FIFTY-TWO



THE harvesting was over, and the farmer now employed Chris in gathering apples into large heaps for the cider-making. Mr. Giles's wage-bill of regularly employed labour was a large one, and although he indicated to Chris that he would be glad to engage him for the following summer, he suggested that he should look for work elsewhere during the intervening months.

Chris told the news to Nelly one Sunday afternoon in late September. She received it without open distress. "I feel," he said, "that I have acted badly and ought never to have made love to you. You see I now have to be a tramp whether I like it or not."

They were walking along a grassy drove, between high hedges bright with hips and haws, and she stopped still in the middle of the way and threw her arms round his neck. "What nonsense you are talking," she said. "You have given me only happiness. I should be willing to die now. I was miserable when you came, but even when you have gone I shall still be happy because I have known love. Every word you have ever said I have by heart. All the conversations we have ever had, and every lane we have ever wandered down, and every field we have entered, are fixed in my mind. Nothing can rob me of my memories. I feel quite a different person from what I used to be. Perhaps everybody has to meet despair once in their lives. I lived with despair once, but you drove it from me."

He put his arm round her. "Never till I am dead," he thought, "will I forget the selfless magnanimity of this woman." He felt his whole being melt towards her. He tried to imprint upon his mind the disinterested strength of her person, the sensitive curving lines of her full lips, the grace of her soft neck, where stray wisps of hair brushed against it below her conch-like ears. "Nelly, you are lovely," he said. "I do, I do love you."

"I love you also," she answered.

They walked on in silence. The countryside about them lay somnolent and prostrate as though quiescent at last after the burden of its abundant fertility. The air was heavy with the indefinable smell of oncoming autumn. It smelt of frosts, though none yet had stiffened the grass. It smelt of damp fallen leaves, though in every direction the trees still carried their coloured trophies. Gossamer cobwebs garlanded the hawthorn hedges, and in the distance vague mists enshrouded the landscape.

"This may be our last walk for months. Let us visit that hill over there which overlooks the plain," he said. The hill he pointed out had been celebrated for centuries for the oolite stone it provided. All the great buildings of the West Country had been constructed of material extracted from its matrix. Generations of quarrymen had worked upon it with pickaxe, crowbar, and saw. They had burrowed deep into its bowels, but still the hill presented in outward shape its same leonine form. It was believed in the villages deriving a livelihood out of its primitive wealth that the stone *grew*.

They had got away earlier than usual that afternoon, and they had long hours before them. They reached the foot of the hill at last, refreshing themselves by drinking at a small well which they found before beginning the ascent. Nelly knelt down, cooling her flushed cheeks in the fringed circular pool. The water was contained in a round hole, the sides of which were half hidden by small ferns. The spring was so pellucid that each particle of sand

was visible on its bottom. At the back of it, deep in the water, a weed raised itself. Its fronds swayed to and fro as the girl's cheeks disturbed the pool. Chris noticed these green pyramids, and when Nelly stood up and shook the drops from her hair he put his hand into the water and brought some of the weed to the surface. "Oh! don't do that," Nelly called. "I so admired it growing there. I opened my eyes under water, and those waving weeds looked like towers of emerald that travellers might come upon. Look, now you have spoilt its life." And true enough, when Chris put the weed over the back of one of his hands it had lost its lift and delicacy.

"But it's nice even like this," he said, anxious to justify his action. "It's like a mesh, a web of green silk. When we get to the top of the hill I shall weave you a wimple of it."

"What is a wimple?" she asked, but already their attention was taken up in scaling the grassy slopes. They followed a small winding path, the yellow clay of which had been churned by the sharp pointed hoofs of sheep. Once on the top of Ham Hill they looked round. There lay the great fertile valley of Somerset outstretched before them, bordered by Exmoor, the Quantocks, the Mendips, and the Corton Downs. Glastonbury Tor was just visible in the Vale of Avalon. On that still afternoon the landscape offered indisputable witness to the labour of the generations, each field so neatly parcelled out, each elm tree so carefully polled.

They now walked in a southerly direction along

the top of one of the earthworks heaped up by legionaries when the hill had been occupied by the Romans. Their purpose was to reach that part which was still being quarried. Presently they came to an abandoned pit out of which stone sufficient for building Sherborne Abbey must at one time have been taken. They walked down the grassy sward which led gently to its depths. The quarry had the air of some vast ruin. Time had softened the rude gashes of man's handiwork. Its clean-cut sides were mantled with ivy, and a smooth green turf topped each ragged projection. Their appearance disturbed a flock of jackdaws which with a great clamour and scattered flight disappeared over the broken outline of the quarry's top. The moss was so thick under their feet that their footfalls made no sound. "See how that ivy streams down in that corner," Nelly said. "Some of those trailers must be as long as bell ropes."

"I will toll the bell then," cried Chris, catching hold of one of them.

"Oh! Don't say toll, say ring," besought the girl with a look of distress on her face.

Chris hardly listened to her. His interest had been directed elsewhere. The movement he had made with the ivy revealed the fact that it concealed a large cave some ten feet above where they were standing. They found that with difficulty it was possible to climb up to it, and they soon were sitting side by side in the partial darkness. The silence, the security of the place, turned Chris's thoughts to

love. "But it's like being in a tomb," said the girl. "Look, there's a bat clinging to that stone up there."

Whatever inhibition she may have had at first was soon overcome as she felt his hands, his arms about her.



FIFTY-THREE



CHRIS discovered that it was no easy matter to find sufficient work to keep food in his belly and a roof over his head. One very wet night he was driven to seek shelter in a workhouse, but the experience he had in the sombre long-winged building, grown over with Virginia creeper damp and leafless, confirmed the prejudice he always felt against these hostels.

When he left in the morning he very soon became aware that the lice which had disturbed his sleep had got into his clothes. It took nearly a week before he was free of them. He used to find some secluded pond and then take off his garments one by one, and after making a careful examination of them, he would wash them in turn in the water. Hardly would he have left the field, however, strewn about with fodder for the hungry stock, when he would be aware that his efforts had been of little avail.

Once more he would take off his vest to find these mites smaller than the smallest flea in all the vigour of their tiny life. It was a phenomenon that amazed him. Often in his extremity he would eat raw turnips. This was after it was no longer possible to find apples and walnuts in out-of-the-way orchards.

As Christmas approached he spent his time collecting mistletoe. He would go from field to field marking the best bunches, and then in the night return to the trees and with his pocket knife cut them down. He soon developed, as indeed he well might, a fear of policemen, and when he stood on the pavements of the country towns offering his trophies for sale he kept a very alert eye upon the stolid figure directing the traffic at the corner. He lived hard. He was more often hungry than not, and for days his clothes never dried. He made up his mind that as soon as ever he could he would get steady work. Yet even in his lowest hours his spirits remained good, and never, never for a moment, did he regret his escape from the school. He was not so well reconciled to his separation from Nelly. Often in the loft of a barn, or in some snug recess in a corner of a field, his mind would revert to the happiness of the summer. He certainly could not ask her to share his present life with him, and yet her companionship would have made all the difference. With her these daily adventures might have been thrilling. Her personality haunted him. Whenever his fugitive thoughts came to rest on the tender girl

he would be aware of a most blessed release. The harshness of the outside world would give way, and he would find himself happy as a child in a field of cowslips. He planned how after next year's harvest was finished he would walk up to London and visit Raymond and perhaps persuade him to give him work in his bookshop. He might be able with justification to win Nelly like this, though any re-entrance into the recognized paths of life was alarming to him; for all he knew he might find himself in a second trap as base as the first. He might become a colporteur and go round the streets with a bag of books on his back, or the two of them might get out of the country as stowaways. Anyway he was all right as long as his health held, and soon the spring would come and it would be warmer and more easy to live.

On Christmas Eve he found himself walking along the road that leads from Sherborne to Dorchester. He was approaching High Stoy. He knew this country well. He had been along the wooded ridge the week before, gathering holly. Nowhere else were there to be found such fine berries. He had sold them in Yeovil. His recent successes had enabled him to have regular meals of bread and cheese, and he still had thirty shillings wrapped in paper at the bottom of his pocket.

It had begun raining soon after twelve o'clock, and now in the late afternoon it had settled down to a heavy drenching storm. "This ought to cool my romantic ardour," he thought. In truth, the prospect

as he trudged along that deserted road was desolate. Now and again a cart would pass him, the dispirited horse trotting manfully on in front of the trundling conveyance, or it would be a great motor van of oil throwing up liquid mud on the wayside grass, or a swiftly moving private car with the driver tense and preoccupied at the wheel. It was no night to be out—that was certain. The rain drifted down in gusts. It dripped from high boughs, it dripped from the rude stones, from his own cap, from each naked bird-deserted twig in the hedge.

When he reached the cottages of Lyon's Gate he hesitated and was in two minds to beg for food and shelter, so snug did the interiors of the houses look with their lamps already lighted. His intention was diverted, however, by the suspicious glance a woman gave him who came out for the moment to look up the road. He mounted the hill. When he reached the turning to Glanville Wotton he noticed the figure of a man before him. There was something about his casual manner of walking that at once informed Chris, who had become wise in such matters, that he was about to overtake a tramp. It had been his custom to avoid these fellow travellers. He was tired of listening to their stories. They were almost always of the same kind. They told of their activities in the past before they took to the road, of opulent relatives who would gladly help to restore their fortunes if only they cared to swallow their pride and go to them. It was almost dark when he caught up with the wayfarer, who was wearing a long black

overcoat muddy at the bottom. The man did not pause in his trudging. He turned his head and looked at Chris. He had a rough iron-grey beard.

"Bad night, Mister, to be out," he said. "You wait till we get to the top of Stoy and we'll get it proper." The wind tossed the overhanging trees backwards and forwards above the sloping shoulders of the two pedestrians. A single Scotch fir loomed up. It stood on the top of a rain-soaked bank above the road. It looked like a gigantic symbol of wild melancholy as the heavy sable masses of its outstretched arms swayed to and fro, emitting spasmodic creaks. "Hark! how thick fir do holler out. And be damned if 'a' be a-singing a Christmas carol, nor saying no Christmas prayer, neither. I be wet from forelock to arse. 'Tis my first day out of gaol."

"Why, what was the row?" Chris queried.

"Oh! Caught fine I was, with a bag full of Squire Husting's pheasants. 'Twas one of they stable boys what squealed, and I'll knock the b—— head off him when I come by him."

"Where does Squire Husting live?" Chris inquired.

"At Wotton Towers down in the Vale," the man answered.



FIFTY-FOUR



AT THE time that Chris and his companion were mounting the crest of High Stoy, Flora Husting was listlessly turning over the pages of a book in the drawing-room of Wotton Towers. She had curled herself up in a big chair before a wood fire which burnt brightly in the wide fireplace. The room was illuminated by a single shaded lamp. The bookcases, the distant tables, the heavy curtains that draped the tall mullioned windows, were in shadow. The girl alone was in a luminous circle. She was listless and unhappy. Her husband was practising billiards in another room. She had never loved him, and lately the difference of their temperaments had caused them to grow more and more disaffected. Humbold Husting had married Flora for her money. The match had been made by Flora's mother when the girl was too young to know her own mind. The Wotton Towers estate was one of the oldest in the county, but it was heavily mortgaged, and the young squire had not been slow in availing himself of a marriage that would re-establish his fortunes. He was a presentable man of a little over thirty years. Well constituted and athletic, it would have been difficult to tell from his clean-shaven face, with its cold blue eyes and neatly brushed hair, the essential narrowness of his character. Actually he was out

for the main chance, but his purpose was not easy to be detected. His self-interested aims were concealed by an exterior that presented the appearance of well-bred propriety. It was only when any of his personal interests were threatened that his true nature was exposed. Then it was that the cold and controlled gentleman suddenly displayed his ill-ordered soul. In the breakfast room, in the stable, in his lady's chamber, he would bite like a vicious horse. Such demonstrations, however, were seldom made in public. It was his groom, his valet, his wife, who knew about them. To the rest of the world, represented by his companions in the clubroom and hunting-field, he appeared a rather unsympathetic landowner of a very ordinary type. Perhaps through inheritance, perhaps through his own nature, Humbold Husting was one of those privileged persons who take as a matter of course their own personal advantages. He never indulged in self-analysis or self-criticism, any more than he investigated the origin of the fortune he had inherited. He took his position for granted, and the servants he employed and the tenants of his farms and cottages in his sight found their only justification for living in so far as they contributed to his well-being. At each chance his thoughts and arguments were formulated to protect his own interests. His reactions had no margins. He recognized no claims other than those that contributed to his prosperity. He was never tired of railing against his heavy taxation, and through the employment of a London accountant did all that

was in his power to defraud the state of its rightful dues. In his dealings with his land agent he considered only proposals advantageous to himself. He was occupied chiefly in playing bridge and hunting, and it used to irritate Flora to see him after dinner cross his legs and divert his aimless thoughts with a fashionable weekly picture paper. Actually he was a product of an artificial social efflorescence, but his assurance gave to his comings in and goings out the semblance of an absolute reality that only some bloody revolution or appalling catastrophe of nature could have shaken. The look of his well-polished hunting-boots behind the kitchen door alone seemed to confirm his preconceptions, as also did his silk dressing-gown and heavy gold cigarette case. "He has the mind of a boy," Flora would often say to herself, "but of a very unpleasant boy." It used to tease her to sit opposite him at table and see him satisfy his vigorous appetite with so many choice viands, for he was a great meat-eater and never was sick or out of sorts for a single day.

His wife was different. She was sensitive to all the difficulties and troubles of her household. She felt implicated in the affairs of each cottage on the estate. It was impossible for her to disentangle herself from the threads of existences other than her own. An old woman in a back kitchen had only to give her a look of distress and she found herself involved.

Their four years of intimacy had shown the young squire to be vulnerable in one small crevice of his

armour. He was extremely vain, and the wayward indifference of his wife acted as a constant irritant to his personal composure. He could not imagine why she, unlike all the rest of the world, did not contribute to his self-esteem. She was always outraging his sense of decorum. In the early summer morning he would wake to find that she had slipped out to bathe in the pleasure lake that was full of black leeches and was only meant to be used for boating. On wild winter afternoons she would go out for long walks and be late for dinner and then take it in the kitchen. She would make fun of the county people who called, talk to them in her proud clever manner, and then slip away across the polished floor of the hall to help the shepherd in Mark's barn shear the sheep. She was unaccountable to him. She made him feel ill at ease. He would utter some pompous platitude and would be astonished to see her lips pout as though in mockery. They did not exactly quarrel, but gradually it was borne in upon him that she had escaped his domination. With a kind of angry fury he would humiliate her, humble her in their intimate physical embraces. But there she would be in the morning as evasive and untouched as ever, running across the drenched lawn in her thinnest slippers and answering his protests with the same evasive mocking glance from her blue eyes. He tried to reduce her with his dry superior smile, but only succeeded in feeling dull and foolish. "By gad!" he said to himself. "I suppose it was the way she was brought up. I must be firm and tactful

and I'll get her round," and he would walk off to the end of the terrace to have a look at the rain gauge, only to find that it was filled to the brim with little empty snail shells that Flora had spent an afternoon collecting behind the rhododendrons under the terrace wall. The servants adored their mistress as much as they disliked and feared their master. He would move about the house as if he were hardly conscious of their existence, the slightest lift of his eyebrow sufficed as a morning's salutation.

Flora was miserable on this Christmas Eve. She had wished to give a party to some of the village people, but her husband had refused to countenance the idea. "You spoil them," he had said. "I don't wish to have the house turned inside out just before our dance on Thursday. We do quite enough for the villagers as it is. They are a pampered lot anyway. You are just sentimental about them. Let the parson do it. It's his job, and he has his girls to help him." Flora had allowed the suggestion to drop, but she had felt unreconciled. The prospect of this ball filled her with nothing but boredom. She did not like to have the house turned inside out by a crowd of tiresome neighbours. She put her book aside and went through the hall and up the wide oak staircase to dress for dinner. She paused on the landing to listen to the rain beating against the window panes. "The wind must have got round to the north," she thought. Even where she stood the wild night outside was not able completely to drown the teasing

click click of the ivory balls as they knocked against each other on the green baize table downstairs.



FIFTY-FIVE



CHRIS and his companion also noticed that the wind had changed. "It be cold enough now for frosty," the man said as he laboured forward. "'Tis best for we to find shelter." At the side of a field they saw a building. It was a barn filled with young steers. At the appearance of the two men the animals scrambled to their feet, snorting. The men made a nest for themselves under some bundles, and the bullocks were soon quiet again. They took off their rain-drenched coats and in the closeness of that cattle shelter prepared themselves for the night. Chris divided the cheese and bread he had in his pocket, and soon afterwards the two were asleep. Chris woke when it was still dark. It was cold, inconceivably cold. The cattle were breathing heavily, now and again moving on their pallet of soiled straw. "It is Christmas morning. I might have seen them kneeling," he thought. The wind had gone down, for a loosened board at the back of the shed no longer rattled. Dawn came at last. He could see

the pale greyness through the cracks of the door. His companion was awake now also.

"Danged if I didn't have a dream this 'ere night," he said.

"What did you dream?" Chris asked.

"It were a rum 'un, and I can't well lay my mind to it. I was hid in withy bed down by Stour and did see an ole rooster pheasant come handy-like to where I was stood. I put out my hand to grab en and 'a turned into a peeler who clapped my wrists into irons and had me away to lock-up quick and lively before I properly knowed the son of a bitch weren't a bird. They dreams be sly bastards and can frighten a bloke same as life do under sun and moon."

Chris had now opened the door of the shed. The pools of rain water outside, coloured with the urine and manure of the cattle, were frozen hard. "Goo," said the man at his elbow. "'Tis nothing but soft winds and rain one hour and cold to freeze the hair off your head the next. 'Tis enough to pester we poor fellows into grave. 'Tis the regular b——, I'll tell 'ee."

"Well! I am going back to the hill," Chris announced when they had climbed over the gate into the road. "I'm going after some more holly. I might find a late customer yet, though it is Christmas morning."

"Holly be damned. I'll traipse on to Cerne and see if I can't pick up summat in Lord Digger's coverts. I don't want none of your holly, nor Christmas neither. My guts be as empty as snakes in

winter. Well, so long, mate. Thank 'ee for the lodging." And the two parted.

It was not only his desire to detach himself from the bearded man that caused Chris to turn his steps once more northward. A fancy had come to him that he would like to have a look at this Wotton Towers where Flora Husting lived. It would be exciting, he thought, to appear before her all soiled and bedraggled in his workman's clothes. It would be just the kind of thing that would entertain her, and after all he had thirty shillings in his pocket and was in no great necessity to find work at present. It would be his Christmas holiday. At every step he took it grew clearer. The road was so slippery that he had to walk on the wayside grass, and as he advanced he realized that the whole country had been transformed. Every branch, every twig, was coated with ice. Long drooping icicles were suspended from the thorn trees, from the ash trees, from the elders, and from the hollies. When he struck the hedge with his stick it tinkled as though it were made of glass, and a hundred little fragments of ice fell to the ground. "It's been a silver frost," he thought.

It was not till three days later that he reached the village of Wotton Towers. He had got employment in one of the near-by woods, stacking timber, as some of the regular hands were off work "Christmasing." The weather remained cold. By midday the surface of the ground would be soft, but each night it grew once more hard as iron. Walking to

and fro from the foreman's cottage where he stayed he would see the hoar-frost on the sloping fields disappear under the chill noonday sun. It would remain white and stiff by the hedges and in places sheltered by the gorse, but in the open it would be gone. The rounded sides of the mole hillocks were crisp towards the north, whereas on their south sides they were soft and damp. He would probably have continued in the woods for a longer time had he not been weakened by a chill he had caught, and this made the hard work difficult for him. He had a fever in his blood which he could not shake off.

On the Thursday evening he came into Wotton Towers. It was once more freezing hard. It was the fifth white frost in succession. He stopped at a public house in a back street and on depositing a small sum of money was promised a room for the night. In spite of the shivering malaise he felt, he had been encouraged by the work he had been doing. He was free of anxiety. His life seemed to lengthen out before him as a succession of adventures. Each day, each hour, would bring some unforeseen turn of events. The life of a casual labourer—that was what he was best suited for. Cold and hunger—these were matters worthy of a man's attention. Anything beyond that betrayed the spirit. "Cold and hunger *and women*," he thought, improving upon his reflections.

Little boys were shouting and calling in the silvered ice-bound street outside. They were sliding. Through the window he could see a thatched cot-

tage. A girl was moving under the white-washed rafters of a bedroom. A candle was flickering on the broad sill behind the little lace curtain. Immediately his mind reverted to Nelly. He was always sad when he thought of her. How lovely she was and how generous! The memory of her submissive indulgence to him, of her proud love-making, made him experience, as he sat in the little room, a tugging sensation in his navel. To think of her at all was dangerous, dangerous to his happiness, to the happiness of them both. He felt feverish, but had no headache now. "I'll go out presently and have a look round Wotton Towers," he thought.

"There be some kind of junketing up at Manor tonight," he heard a voice remark.

"'Tis a ball that they be giving, so I heard old Kate say," answered the woman of the house.

"Well, I did zee the light of the cars go on. I zeed them a-coming down Mill hill like so many stars of Bethlehem."

"'Tain't of Bethlehem that they be thinking of. They toffs do nothing but racket about. Fust 'tis hunting, then 'tis dancing, then 'tis off abroad. They'd take the bread out of a poor man's mouth an they could. They don't worry, not they, never think it."

"Well, the lady do worry, Oliver Bool, and don't 'ee say otherwise. She kep' thee old granny all last winter as thee do know well, kep' her warm in life and buried her in wool. For I do know 'twas she who

paid for grave clothes, and for thy gran's coffin too."

"No, 'twere Aunt Mog what paid some o't," the man answered sulkily, "though I'm not saying she ben't a good en, better than thick Humbug—for he be a sharp-fisted wole dog if ever there was one."



FIFTY-SIX



WOTTON TOWERS was situated on some rising ground at the end of a broad park. The gardens and terraces were inclosed by a low wall. As Chris approached it over the frosty grass he could see its wide sixteenth century front ablaze with lights. The winter stars shone down upon the great trees of the park with an arctic brilliance. He noticed the lake. "It must bear," he thought, and he made a slight detour so that he might walk beside it. Its borders were surrounded by a tangled mass of rushes, brown and broken. He stepped through them till he reached a place where they no longer grew out of hard brittle mud, but were set upright as it were in shining glass. A little farther, and he was out on the open ice. Under the sharp contraction that was taking place his weight was sufficient to disarrange some delicate equilibrium, and a long resounding crack

echoed across the white plain. He could hear it from where he was standing, shivering and moaning close up under the banks where in sombre shadow tall cedar trees grew. He retraced his steps cautiously, disturbing some roosting wild fowl which rose in the night sky and with a circling flight crossed to the opposite side of the pond.

He was uncertain as to what he wanted to do. His head had begun to throb again. "I will get as near as I can, look about a little, and then return to my room and go to bed," he thought. He approached the shadow of a large oak tree some twenty feet from the low boundary wall. Its huge trunk was surrounded by a circumference of bare earth. He felt the dry acorns crunch under his boots. He found that even from this position he was unable to see the windows. He walked to the wall and scrambled over it, following along a line of yew trees that stood like silent corporals by the side of an open stretch of grass. Eventually he reached a flight of steps, their pedestals surrounded by pseudo-classical statues. It seemed almost too daring to go up them and cross the gravel terrace. Perhaps he had better turn back. It was then that he noticed a narrow slope at the end of the terrace. If he could reach this he would be able to get up to the house without leaving the grass. He followed along in the shadow of the rhododendrons, but he found this way obstructed by a little iron gate that had been hidden from view. He lifted its latch as silently as he could.

At that moment a door in the wall that separated the garden from the stable yards suddenly opened and he found himself confronting, without hope of escape, two men. They wore heavy overcoats. Seeing some one standing by the small gate, they approached uncertainly, in doubt as to whether they had disturbed one of the guests or a burglar. Chris was at a loss. It would never do to run away, he decided. The next moment he recognized the latter of the two men as Flora Husting's chauffeur, the man he had spoken with as he came up Squire Trotter's drive. It was an embarrassing encounter. Chris explained that he had been in the neighbourhood and had wished to have a look at the famous house. Fortunately Samson remembered his face. They stood talking for a little, and then the chauffeur volunteered to conduct him down the terrace himself. "I was, to tell you the truth, taking my friend here, Mr. Wills, on a tour of inspection. He hasn't been previously acquainted with the fine old mansion."

It was now Chris's lot to accompany the two servingmen along the front of the house. He noticed that they spoke in whispers and stepped very gingerly when they crossed the gravel. "It's a fine old home," Chris's friend went on, "a fine old home of England. It's not many of them left these days, but they still makes the backbone of the country. See what a panorama for the gentlefolk to feast their eyes upon in the summer. I've seen this terrace regularly bursting with company in my time, and

all the flower beds as tidy as a conservatory." While he was speaking he kept making a wide sweep with his heavily gloved hand towards the park. "The money that they must have to keep it up! We all know that the Squire is not so rich, though the items of his rent-roll must make up to four figures—but the young mistress! You and I, Mr. Wells, if we lived to a hundred, could never reckon what comes to her. I hope she will live to enjoy it, for she's as good-hearted a young woman as a man could find. Never a sharp word from her. It's 'Samson, get yourself a good meal; Samson, find yourself a good bed,' when we go out in the touring-car. 'Samson, get yourself a drink if you are thirsty,' that's Mrs. Husting all over.

"Step along here, Mister, if you please," and the three men drew near to one of the windows of the mansion. "If you stand on the branch of this shrub you'll be able to see the company."

The dance music came flooding out into the cold night, and Chris, with his hands on the stone ledge of the window, looked into the hall. He saw a man's head quite close to him. It was slightly bowed as though he was speaking to some one out of sight. A little farther away three grey-haired women were seated. Chris knew their type well. Even in this fleeting glance he could see their sharp glittering eyes and tight prohibitive lips. "They can disguise their bodies but not their souls," he thought. Out on the polished floor the couples were dancing. It was a graceful scene. A young man and a young woman

had seated themselves facing the window. He could see the girl's animated self-conscious expression, the man looking down at his shoes. They neither of them knew what to say to the other. "She is thinking about her dress and how she looks and he of something completely remote from her. Yet they both are troubled with a conviction of their social inadequacy. Now those two are enjoying themselves," he thought as a slim girl with yellow hair came into view, dancing with a tall ruddy man with a round jovial face. Then suddenly he caught sight of Flora; she was walking under the sconces at the end of the hall, dressed in a white satin gown. She was without a partner and carried a fan pointed like the wing-feathers of a herring gull. He felt Samson's hand on his coat, but he balanced himself just long enough to see Flora seat herself at the feet of a little old woman dressed in black; and then down he was again on the ground with the bough of the yew tree swinging back to its original position.

"It's like a regular picture to see them, isn't it?" came Samson's smooth voice. "It looks pretty on the outside, don't it? But to those who know," he said with a significant nod, "it's not all love in the cottage, and not all love in the castle. Before you go, Mister, won't you step round and take a drop of cordial in the servants' hall with me and Mr. Wells? Perhaps you'd oblige us with a tune on that flute of yours what you played so tony-like by the pleasure lake when we first became acquainted."



FIFTY-SEVEN



FLORA HUSTING that evening had had one of the most bitter quarrels with her husband since their marriage. The footman who was decorating the hall with holly had slipped from the steps and fallen heavily on to the back of a high Jacobean chair. Flora, who was superintending the arrangement of a curtain at the opposite end of the room, ran to the man's assistance. Humbold Husting heard the noise of a fall and came out of the billiard room. He was annoyed by the undisguised concern shown by his wife on behalf of the servant. He spoke sharply to the man, rebuking him for his carelessness. Flora turned towards him indignantly.

"How can you speak in that tone, Humbold?" she said, stamping her foot on the sprays of greenery that were strewn on the floor. "The boy may be seriously injured."

Humbold flushed. "Flora, come here," he said with cold authority. The footman rose to his feet and with an expression of long-suffering exaggerated self-control on his subservient face limped towards the kitchen, holding his side. Flora, suppressing her irritation, followed her husband into the drawing-room. Mr. Husting closed the door. "How dare you speak to me like that before the servants?" he said in a tone of chilled fury. "There is no limit

to your ill behaviour. You shame me. You mortify me. Any one would think you cared more for this wretched lackey than you do for me."

"Humbold, I will not have you use the words 'how dare you' in connexion with me! You must know that I dare anything." She spoke with flashing eyes and a proud toss of her head. "It was you who were at fault. I hate you when you behave like this. It is unworthy of you. The most ignorant ploughboy would show more humanity. It is humanity you lack. You are hard and self-centred and cruel."

"Thank you," he said frigidly. "This conduct of yours will not easily be forgiven."

"Do you think I care whether you forgive me or don't forgive me?"

"Flora, please control yourself. I will not be drawn into such wrangling. You are my wife, and as such you hold an important position in the world, and I must insist on your behaving in a becoming manner. I have long wished to speak to you on this matter. You must remember that people look up to you, and they try to model their behaviour on yours, and if you treat me with disrespect in my own house they will hardly find it an advantage to emulate your conduct."

"Listen, Humbold, when I was at school the headmistress tried to lecture me and I ran away. People have to love me for what I am; I can't change and I won't change."

"You are a willful and headstrong woman," the man said, moving across the room towards an easy-

chair. He had taken only a few steps when he turned upon her once more. She resembled a school-girl more than a woman, standing there with her hands tightly clasped in front of her. Her immaturity irritated rather than appeased him. It seemed preposterous that such a chit of a girl should dare to challenge him. It galled him that after four years he was still incapable of overawing her.

"Flora!" he cried angrily. "I appeal to you as a mere matter of ethics to correct your ways."

"My ways are not directed by such considerations, they never have been."

"My dear young woman, as you grow older I can only hope you may grow wiser," and he seated himself with simulated composure in the deep chair. "Will you kindly ring the bell? I should like some whiskey."

Flora pulled down the gilt handle to the right of the fireplace and stepped out of the room. "I can't, I can't, I can't live any longer with him," she said to herself. "I don't like him, I actually dislike him. I wish I were dead. I am the last person he should have married, the very last." With distaste she thought of him, of the formality of his manners, of his stereotyped conversation, the things he said just like all his friends, the very intonation of his voice the same. The same cigarettes, the same expensive cigars—everything about him the same, the same. "He appeals to my morality now. Good Lord! what next? What is morality anyhow?" she wondered as she sat perched on the top of a large oak chest under

the landing window, her chin on her knees. "He thinks it's self-control and that kind of thing. Well, if it is I wish he would learn to exercise it more when he visits my bed. But morality has nothing to do with that really. It is just a matter of sensitiveness and imagination. Well, I simply can't go on here. I'll have to go abroad or something; I might get Samson to drive me to Sussex tomorrow, only I shall be so tired after this wretched dance.

"Margery!" she called to a maid who in a neat starched cap was carrying a red can of hot water along the passage. "How is William? He had a bad tumble in the hall."

"He says he is stiff, ma'am, but no bones broken," the girl answered.

"Is it freezing outside still?"

"Yes, ma'am, Jameson has been up covering the frames and putting lamps into them, he says it is going to be colder than ever."

"Well, see that there is a good fire in the servants' hall tonight and plenty to eat and drink for the men who come."

"I will tell Cook, ma'am," said the girl as she with quiet discretion turned the handle of Mr. Husting's dressing-room and disappeared.

"Well, I suppose I must go and dress now for dinner. Who was it who was coming?"

gown! You are a winter queen. I could say my prayers to you. You really are ravishing. I insist upon your giving me the name of your dressmaker. Have you seen Roland? The poor dear can't be separated from that Tapsfield girl. He is simply tied to her shimmy. They are sitting out now in the library. It's monstrous. Have you seen Lady Carleton? You never saw such pearls. I dare say they are paste though. Will you be at Wedborough tomorrow night? You ought to come. It's their last party. They are going abroad on Saturday. Why, there's the colonel, I must go and chivy him round. He's such a joke," and the young woman with an intimate ogling glance slid herself away.

Suddenly through the door leading to the servants' quarters there sounded the clear blackbird notes of a flute. Flora recognized the tune immediately. "Why, it must be Chris Holbech." "Apples be ripe and nuts be brown"—the simple rhythm was distinctly audible. "I'll run down and see." But her intention was arrested by the approach of Humbold.

"Flora," he said reproachfully, "I wish you would look into the dining-room. Everything is at sixes and sevens. There is no one there. It's shameful. I can't think where the servants are. They are never where they are wanted."

"It is their supper-time."

"Well, they needn't all have their supper at the same moment, need they? You don't seem to take any interest in what's going on. You do nothing but

wander about by yourself. I can't imagine what's in your mind."

"You never have been able to, and you never will be able to."

"I dare say not," he said coldly. He stood over her, his tall straight back slightly stooping. He was angry. "Whether I understand you or not, as long as you are the mistress of my home you will follow out my wishes."

"But my wishes aren't yours," she answered.

"My dear girl, you are full of whims. Why cannot you be reasonable? We have invited these people here, and the least we can do is to have the fizz available when it's wanted."

"There is plenty of champagne on the sideboard," she answered.

"Yes, but not a footman to open it."

"I have told William to go to bed. He has injured his side from that fall."

This information proved too much for Humbold Husting. Without another word he turned his back and moved towards the dining-room. Flora noted that in spite of his exasperation he had perfect command over his deportment, passing through the various groups with ease and suavity. She heard him remark to a friend, "Hullo, Jim! You are all right again after the toss you took? How's the other fellow who came down on the top of you? Well, you have plenty of time to rest. The hounds won't be out again this week for certain. Even if the weather

breaks it will take days for the bone to be out of the ground. It's damn hard luck."

"He doesn't care. He thinks only of hunting. How I hate this life! I should like to run away." This thought of running away brought back to her mind the flute-playing she had heard, and she slipped through the padded door and went down the passage in the direction of the servants' quarters.

At her appearance the laughter and talk in the kitchen subsided. "Didn't I hear the sound of a flute just now?" she inquired.

"Yes, ma'am, it was an acquaintance of Samson's playing the instrument in the servants' hall, but I told him to put it away. I was afraid it might be heard by the company."

"Is the man still in the hall?" she asked.

"No," the woman answered. "He has gone. Should I send one of the lads after him?"

"Gone?" she said, and snatching up the cook's woollen shawl that was lying upon a Windsor chair near the table, she opened the back door and darted out into the night.

Some of the chauffeurs were in the servants' hall and others collected about a stove in the saddle room of the stables. No one saw the mistress of the house leave except the cook and the kitchen maid.

"She's a wild one, she is," the cook observed when the door had slammed back into its place. "The master would take on something terrible if he could see his young lady fly out of house like a bird from cage. But don't thee say nothing, Martha, me gal.

What isn't spoken isn't heard. But it's a wicked cold night for a grand lady to run about in with little more than a shift over her pretty shoulders."

"How did she come to be acquainted with that fluting chap?" the kitchen maid inquired. "I never knowed she knowed him."

"She may have just wanted to give money to en," the cook observed. "She'd burn her hand any day if 'twere but to save a chafer. That's not the master's ticket, I'll tell 'ee. 'Keep what you got' is the tune he whistles by, and it's luck with him to have so soft and pretty a mistress to his sheets, I'll tell 'ee that straight."



FIFTY-NINE



CHRIS had reached the place where the drive through the park took a turn towards the lake. He was giddy and feverish. He had laid more store upon his imagined meeting with Flora than he had consciously known, and now he was returning unrewarded. He was aware of a vague depression that the clear vigour of the night could not lift. The glimpse he had got of Flora stuck in his mind: the way she had stood for a moment, one hand on the panelling, to let the dancers go by, the way she had

sat down so naturally at the feet of the old woman, "as though she were out of doors," he thought. She was certainly an entrancing creature.

Suddenly he heard the sound of some one running behind him. He looked round. He could not be mistaken. It was Flora. None but she could run with so free and abandoned a movement, as she had used to do on the seashore. He stood to welcome her. She never lessened her pace till she was right up to him, and instinctively he opened his arms as he might to the winner of a race. For a moment he held her close. "What is it?" he said.

"Oh!" she cried. "I thought you were going away without me. I told you if ever you came and played that tune I'd follow you, and here I am. I am running away!"

"What do you mean?" he asked in bewilderment. She laughed her characteristic laugh. Then, as she had done in Sussex, she kissed him, but this time on the mouth. There were tears on her cheeks. "But you can't just go out of your home like this," he said.

"Why can't I if I want to? I'm tired of being married, I am tired of this place. I want to change my life. I hate Dorset and all the ridiculous people who live in it. And anyway it is not for you to remonstrate with me. It was you who taught me how to do it." Again she laughed her peculiar laugh, so soft and secret.

She persuaded him to abandon his will to her wayward mood. "Come on then," he responded at

last, "let's get down to the lake, for some one may follow you."

They had hardly reached the frozen rushes when the whir of a motor car sounded in the yard of Wotton Towers, and a moment later they saw two of these vehicles pass down the drive. "It's too early for any one to be going away yet. They must have begun looking for me already," she commented.

"But, Flora, you can't come with me dressed as you are."

"Why not?" she laughed. "I am dressed quite modestly, am I not?"

"But you'll catch your death of cold."

"Oh! no, I never catch cold," she said, "never bodily cold. It's my mind and spirit that suffer from that complaint, and I am curing them every second out here."

"Isn't there any secluded lane that would take us out of the neighbourhood?" he asked her.

"Yes," she said, "by crossing the ice and going round those cedar trees we can get to one that leads away from the village."

Hand in hand they crossed the lake.

"How black the ice is! It must have looked like this when the Russians killed Rasputin. I'm glad we are not bent on murder."

"Aren't your feet cold in those white slippers?"

"No," she answered. "I don't feel cold at all."

They crossed a sloping field and entered a lane. After half an hour's walk they reached the banks of the Stour. The river lay dark and still between wide

meadows white with frost. "There is a foot-bridge farther down, and when we cross it we can follow the bank all the way to Blandford. They'll never think I've gone that way.

"Tell me," she questioned, "what you have been doing all these months," and as they crossed the bewitched fields, unravished, untouched by anything except the dainty procedure of winter, spellbound in the cold clear air, he told her the story of his summer. He hid nothing of his love for Nelly. She listened in silence. "I think she must be an awfully brave girl," she said at last. "But you ought to write to her or go to see her so as to make sure that she is in no difficulty. How fortunate if she does have a child by you."

They had reached the bridge now, and they paused for a moment in its centre gazing down into the river below. "Look!" she exclaimed. "I can see the constellations reflected in the water. There's Cassiopeia—and there is Perseus." The tiny sparks of light twinkled under their eyes.

Chris glanced at the small figure at his side, so intent, so absorbed in tracing the celestial patterns. Giddy though he was, he also saw this second firmament. The arched sky above their heads was lighter and brighter, but this other illusory universe brought to his mind the same sense of being suspended in space. "It is as though we were standing on a single plank between the upper and nether abyss," he said. "You and I alone standing side by side upon matter shrivelled to the thickness of a coffin board."

"Why did you say coffin board?" she interjected, but he went on speaking as if he had not heard.

"How dark the shadow of that tree looks, outstretched there! I suppose the roach never feel cold. Do you think on nights like this they get any cheer from the starshine on the water? Do you think they avoid those darker places in the river as pits that breed melancholy? Look up, Flora, see how bright the stars are, the Milky Way staining the sky with its infinite multitude of systems. And yet people have the audacity to try to regulate love-making."

"I have never thought like that," she said, giving a little laugh.

He put out his hand to rearrange the cook's shawl about her. "I do pray you won't catch cold," he exclaimed.

"What shall we do, where shall we go? I must get some other clothes as soon as possible," she said excitedly as they stepped once more upon the crisp grass.

"We will travel through Wiltshire and Gloucestershire first, and then work our way round to Devonshire and Cornwall, living as best we can. I shall be able to get casual work, and then the spring will soon be here and we shall be able to earn our living in more agreeable ways. I know where the best watercress beds are near Seaton and Sidmouth and Torquay. We will gather it in the early mornings and then bind it up in little bundles to sell in the towns."

"That's the kind of thing I have always wanted

to do," she said. "And I might play the guitar in the streets, and you your flute. It will be lovely. I should have killed myself if I had had to go on living all my life at Wotton Towers. Already it seems far off in the past. Perhaps it would be possible to join with some gypsies. I have always wanted to do that."

On they walked. In silent majesty the ordered star groups followed each other across the midnight sky. Field after field they traversed. "I feel as if I had escaped with a princess," he said. "The labourers used to call me Jack-o'-lantern in Somerset."



CHRIS noticed presently that the girl was constantly falling behind him and snatching up little handfuls of frozen grass. "Are you smelling the frost?" he asked. "I also like to do that."

"No," she answered, "I am thirsty and am trying to drink."

"Wait a moment and I'll get you some water from the river." They both approached its bank, Chris looking about for some place where he could climb down. Suddenly without warning the turf upon which he was standing, undermined and made

unsafe by the frost, gave way. He tried to save himself by catching at an alder. For a second it supported him, and then with a splash he was in the river, struggling amongst the litter left by the floods in the dark half-frozen backwater under the tree. He was out again and on the bank in a moment, but drenched to the skin. The sound of his fall and the look of the sluggish river as he disappeared had terrified Flora, and it was several minutes before he could reassure her.

"I am tired," she said at last, all her former buoyancy gone. "I am sure you will catch pneumonia or something."

"Oh, no, I won't," he declared. "It's only like taking a cold bath." He looked back. "What do you think made the soil give way like that? I would never have thought such a thing could happen. I wasn't standing so very near the edge either." He felt humiliated by the mishap.

They presently saw a large square haystack in the corner of the field. It was buttressed on one side by three heavy pieces of timber. By means of one of these Chris was able to reach the thatch. He crawled to the side of the stack next the hedge, and there, carefully removing the straw, he prepared a small nest deep down in the hay. To achieve his purpose he was forced to throw into the hedge a number of armfuls of the sweet-smelling fodder. When the refuge was ready he called back to Flora. She had already climbed up, and together they retired to their selected sleeping-place. "You are sure

to be cold in those wet clothes," she murmured anxiously, but he dismissed her distress with a laugh.

In their deep lair all was secure and sheltered, and his mind was already aflame with other pre-occupations. "How sweet the hay smells!" his companion said as, covering herself in her thick shawl, she curled herself up like a kitten. "Here's a piece of last summer's clover," she exclaimed, and in the darkness he felt her put the morsel of dry herbage in his hand. "It's funny to think," she continued, "that this little flower was being visited by bees and butterflies that evening when I kissed you by the lake. If we had been told we would never have believed that it would help to make our bed."

The last word made Chris tremble. Dare he, dare he make intimate love to her? Very lightly he laid his hand on the girl's thigh. He caressed it as he might the flank of some animal. He moved his hand and realized that she was trembling. "Flora," he whispered, "may I make love to you?" She gave no answer. He grew more daring and drew her to him. All at once in that dark sequestered recess all her reserve vanished. Wet as he was, she clung to him, covering his face with kisses. The satin dress that hid her slender body had been sufficient to preserve its warmth. She was unconservant with the scholarship of restraint. They embraced in their burrow under the thoughtless enchantment of the senses. Neither of them regarded the little sharp thistle thorns embedded in the hay.

They were content to be still at last, and Flora arranged herself once more for sleep. Chris, no longer supported by extreme physical excitement, felt a strange coldness creep over his body. In his mind, however, he remained feverishly alive. "Flora," he said at last, "life has to offer no pleasure like that. Aristippus was right. It is the head, the crown, of all delights. Nothing else can compare with it. I would like to tell all young boys and girls that this is so. Those who teach otherwise lie in their throats. For this moment alone, if my soul was required of me tonight, I would be content. Years without love are valueless, of no account. Oh! I have been so happy." The girl said nothing, but he felt her lift her head up for a kiss. In a little time he knew by her breathing that she slept. He was too cold to sleep. He waited for the hours to pass. Once she woke. "I am cold," she murmured. Chris took off his coat and by laying it out upon the hay above them made their nest the more air-tight. His teeth began now to chatter in a way he had never known them to do before, and presently he became aware of a succession of ague-like spasms that stiffened his limbs. "God!" he said to himself, "I believe I am going to be really ill. What wretched fortune that it should happen just now! Well, I must wait and see how I feel in the morning."



SIXTY-ONE



FLORA HUSTING was very cold when she woke, but in good spirits. She pushed away the heavy hay that had sheltered her. "Now we must think out some plan," she said.

"We must first of all go and get something to eat," Chris whispered. His voice was hoarse, and he articulated the words with difficulty.

"Oh! you *have* caught cold," she cried in a voice full of alarm. "We never ought to have done this. We ought to have got rooms at a cottage where you could have put on dry things. Why, you haven't even your coat on." She scrambled up, and brushing it free of hay, held it out for him. He was hardly able to move his arms, his limbs were held in so sinister a rigour. She chafed his hands in her distress; they were like dead hands. The sun, round and orange-coloured, had risen over the white fields. She could see its bright actual daytime light on the twigs of the thorn hedge they were facing. She looked hard at him. "You are really ill," she said.

Erratic as she was, Flora Husting could be upon occasions extremely competent. She realized perfectly the serious nature of Chris's condition. She drew him down into the farthest recesses of the hollow and covered him up as best she could. "You must stay here," she said. "I am going to get food

at a cottage. I can see smoke coming from it over the trees. You must rest quietly where you are."

Chris lay as she had left him. He found if he kept still he was in no great pain. At intervals he shivered as though the very marrow of his bones had absorbed some malady. Minutes passed, he could not tell how many. Like a dream, all that had happened was re-enacted in a kind of dim pageant before his intelligence.

The sun was warm upon the stack when he heard Flora sliding across the frosted straw of its thatch. She was wearing a dark skirt and a woollen jersey. "You must try to come now," she said; "I have a car waiting at the corner of the lane." She produced a parcel filled with warm underwear and some corduroy clothes. Slowly and with difficulty Chris put them on. She gave him some warm milk that she had brought in a bottle. He drank a little of this, but could eat nothing. The girl helped him to the ground, and very slowly they walked in the direction she indicated. The exercise seemed to strengthen him, and by the time they reached the car they were both a little reassured.

The car was a closed one, and as he felt it roll forward over the crackling roads he was encouraged. He held her hand. "Where are we going?" he asked, still speaking with difficulty. His chest seemed hard and rough. "I must have caught an awful cold," he thought.

"Never mind where you are going. You mustn't talk—you mustn't even think. Try to sleep."

And he did manage to sleep for long hours, it seemed to him. Whenever he opened his eyes he would see the hedges gliding swiftly past; sometimes they would be in the streets of cities—but always they were farther and farther away from the river Stour. On and on they went. "It must be almost evening now," he thought. There was a little nosegay of artificial flowers set in a cone-shaped vase of glass. "Our wedding flowers," he jested, but when he looked at Flora he saw that she was crying. "I am not so bad as all that," came to his mind.

It was past four when the car drew up at the door of Squire Trotter's house. The driver was paid and given money to carry back to the cottage woman who had befriended them. The Squire had received the news of their coming by telegram, and he himself helped to get Chris upstairs and into bed. In spite of his suffering Chris was conscious of a sensation of infinite well-being as he lay at last in the warm bed that had been prepared for him and watched the reflection of the glowing fire dance upon the ceiling and the walls. He could not bear to have Flora out of the room, and as the evening advanced, whenever he opened his eyes she was always there sitting in a small armchair that had been drawn near to him. Once he was conscious of a stranger bending over him. Again he opened his eyes and realized that Flora had changed her dress. "She is wearing her dancing-gown," he thought. "She must have left the ballroom." By midnight he was completely delirious.

"He is in a serious condition," the doctor had announced to Flora and the Squire on the landing outside.

"He isn't going to die, is he?" the girl inquired desperately, hoping that her dread conviction would not be confirmed.

"It is no time to talk of death," the man answered, moving uneasily towards the stairs. "He has a strong constitution and we will pull him through all right."

"What is it?" she asked.

"Oh! rheumatic fever, a touch of pneumonia too perhaps. I shall know better when I see him in the morning."

All through the night Flora watched by him. Mrs. Collet was summoned from the cottage to help her. In rambling incoherent sentences the fever on the man's brain found speech. The fever talked. It held long monologues. It remained mute. Long soliloquies it uttered and was again silent, as each hour his consciousness sank further away. Flora thought she heard him utter the name "Nelly"—imagined he was calling for her, and sent a servant out with a telegram for Miss Giles to come.

The telegram was handed in at seven o'clock, when the village post-office opened. Eleanor Giles arrived that afternoon, but it was too late. The two women had nothing now to do but watch over the last hours of a dying man. It was apparent that there could be no other issue than death. That vital spark that had burnt with so eager a flame was sinking

fast. The spirit which had flung itself so recklessly against the constituted order of things was being strangled. His breathing could be heard on the landing. It was as though he were swimming across a wide flood.

"Is he conscious?" they asked the doctor with frightened solicitude.

"No, not conscious, absolutely not. It would be impossible."

They bathed his lips. The end was approaching.

Suddenly the strained movement of his chest grew quiet, and for the last time Chris Holbech opened his eyes. They bent over him. He murmured something. They could not catch the words. In another minute a tremor passed through him. He flung out his arms and was dead.



SIXTY-TWO



A GLOOM hung over the manor house the next morning, the peculiar atmosphere of abnormality that besets human habitations containing in some room within their walls a dead person. Doors usually closed remained open, and others that were ordinarily open were now for some unexplained reason fast shut. The bookshelves, the tables, the dining-

room chairs, seemed to withdraw themselves into a level of existence remote from human experience. "We alone," they appeared to say, "witness to a stability that you can never share."

John Trotter endeavoured as best he could to resume his natural activities, but it was with uncertain steps and a preoccupied mind. He sat himself at his desk and cleared his throat as though he had much important business to transact, but always his thought would revert to the silent image above-stairs. He would get up and stand about in the hall, tapping the barometer and wondering whether he could not do something to help the two girls in their distress. He would pick up the *Times* of the day, before and carry it solemnly to the waste-paper basket and then sit on the edge of one of the drawing-room sofas as though he were about to set out on a journey, but had a few minutes to spare. He took a turn round the garden, but he found the prospect outside even more depressing than within. The frost had given out. The wind had gone back to the south, and the gravel paths gave unpleasantly under foot. The air was heavy with a cold mist. It hung about the trees and obscured the shrubberies. He saw Flora go to the arbutus tree to pick some of its red berries, and crossed the lawn to help her.

"I think you ought to write a letter to that school-master so that he could tell his wife," she said.

"I shall do so at once," the Squire answered, and set off towards the house, relieved to have some definite occupation. He wrote Mr. Hinny a short

note and himself walked with it down to the post.

The letter duly arrived at its destination the following morning. The Rev. Hugh read it. "Chris Holbech has died," he said to his wife.

"Has died?" she exclaimed in shocked surprise.

"Yes, from pneumonia. I fear this will be an added distress to Adela, who has had to bear so much."

"How did it happen?" Mrs. Hinny asked.

"The letter does not give any particular information. I shall go across to Adela after breakfast," and he helped himself to a second piece of toast from the silver rack. "I am indeed sorry for the boy, though I can hardly doubt it is for the best," and he wiped his lips with his large napkin. "Perhaps we had better take Adela with us to St. Moritz. The change would do her good. During these last few months she has been under a heavy strain, and although she has borne her trial with true Christian fortitude"—he now coughed his solemn little cough—"it has told upon her. She isn't the girl she was once. We must trust," he was speaking now in a more cheerful tone, "that the passing of time and the innocent diversions of society will heal her wounds. I hear Lord Langhorne is at St. Moritz again this year," he remarked irrelevantly. "It will be interesting to see whether he will be able to hold the skating championship. After I have seen Adela I shall walk down to the town. My new skates ought to have come."

When he got out into Sycamore Avenue he found

that the trees were enshrouded in a fog, and little particles of grey moisture adhered to his black coat, the velvet collar of which felt cold to his neck.

Adela's reaction to Chris's departure had passed through several phases. When she had waked after the quarrel to find he had not returned she felt injured and angry, and her feelings had not been softened by hearing of his association with a servant girl at the school. She felt disgraced and doubly disgraced by being flouted for such a rival. When she returned to her home at the end of the summer holidays her attitude altered a little. A hint dropped by Mary Kennedy made her suspect her uncle's version of the story, and as the days passed her peace of mind was disturbed by moods of regret and something that approached remorse. She wrote letters to his London address. The fact that she received no answer accentuated her trouble. "I have killed his love for me," she thought. She now accused herself. If she had been more understanding it would never have happened. She should have thrown herself into his interests. What to her were the uglier aspects of his character fell into the background, and she now remembered a thousand eccentricities that seemed endearing. The great bone of the dinosaur remained on the shelf solidly to condemn her. She began to idealize her husband in a manner that would have been dangerous had they been fated to see each other again.

"Adela," said Mr. Hinny, wiping his polished boots on the little hall mat, "I have a very painful

piece of news to tell you. It's about your husband."

"He has run off with another woman," she thought. "There is a new scandal."

The Rev. Hugh hung his black hat up on a peg. "Perhaps I could speak with you in your drawing-room." They entered the room and he stood with his back to the bright fire. "I am sorry to have to tell you that he has died." Adela's heart sank. She had during the last weeks felt confident that one day they would be reunited, and the words she heard filled her heart with misery. Her uncle proceeded, "I feel for you very, very deeply, my dear, dear girl, but it may well be that it is for the best. It was the will of God. There was a weakness, as we all know, in this young man. He was essentially weak, and this instability that was, I regret to say so, an integral part of his nature, might well, as the years advanced, have brought upon the heads of those near and dear to him even greater distress than they have already had to endure. You have suffered from it. I have suffered too. Our experience during the summer term is still fresh in our minds. Disorderly, undisciplined conduct invariably brings its own retribution. We must remember the words of scripture—'the wages of sin is death.' I do not mean to say"—he altered the tone now as he caught the expression of genuine unassuageable grief on his niece's face—"I do not mean to say that the unfortunate youth was altogether bad. Who are we to judge? He had certain very estimable qualities, diligence in his work, enthusiasm, a generous temperament. These count

for much in a world where so many relapse into a state of sluggish indifference.”

“I shall go to his funeral,” Adela interrupted. She had not been listening, and the fact was not lost upon her uncle.

“I am on my way to an appointment in the town,” he said with a certain impatience. “I am a little pressed for time. If you feel I can be of any assistance, either in a material or in a spiritual way, please, little girl”—and he laid his white hand on his niece’s shoulder—“remember that the school is still your home.”

The front door closed, and she heard her uncle’s feet upon the gravel. The latch of the small iron gate clicked into place as it had done when her husband had left her on that summer night. “Chris! Chris!” she cried in her extremity. “I did love you, I did really love you—and I do understand.” She ran upstairs, and throwing herself on the double bed, burst into ~~silent~~ sobs. She had long ago had the dressing-table removed from its place in front of the window, and the grey light from outside poured into the room where her basin was still unemptied and her slippers still out on the floor.

After he had left his home the Rev. Hugh remembered that he had forgotten to put in his pocket an advertising pamphlet of winter sporting-goods. He had meant to show it to the loquacious shopman he was on his way to visit. His mind was preoccupied with his impending holiday. “Switzerland is a good place for a man to mark time in,” he said to him-

self. "There's nothing like a holiday in one of those winter resorts for bracing up a man. A fit body spells a wholesome mind. The two go hand in hand. A man must keep himself in perfect training if he is to conquer in the battle of life."

The pamphlet had been removed from the breakfast table, but he found it under the paper-weight on the bureau in the corner of the room. "I shall take Adela along with us. She would meet some nice young people at the hotel. That scamp was in every way a most undesirable character."



SIXTY-THREE



THE village undertaker finished his work late in the evening. As the girls sat with the Squire and Mrs. Trotter in the drawing-room they heard his muffled movements in the room above. John Trotter, who under ordinary circumstances spoke little, did all that he could that evening to keep the conversation alive. He talked to Nelly Giles about Somerset. " 'Good for the bider, bad for the rider,' that's what the old folks used to say about the county. We here in Sussex don't know what mud is. Many a time I have seen a wagon ankle-deep in the lanes about Yeovil."

"I suppose it's the mud that makes the land so fertile," the girl answered absently.

"Depend upon it," the Squire answered. "I've seen some wonderful fields of corn in your part of the county, Miss Giles. I never saw better—nor hay either."

The mention of the corn and the hay fields brought to the girl's mind the bitter thought that she had no need now to idle for those seasons. Her lips quivered and her eyes filled with tears. She rose and pretended to be looking at the books on the high shelves. Flora watched her, her sympathy deeply aroused. "She was his true love," she thought. The Squire stood up. To see sorrow and to be unable to relieve it was more than the good man could bear. With his odd swaying gait he made his way across the room to the sideboard. He opened one of its cupboards and began rearranging some bottles. Flora noticed that his hand, brown and wrinkled and with a signet ring upon it, was trembling. Presently like a schoolboy he went over to the bookcase and approached Nelly with a copy of Bewick's book. "This might interest you," he said. "It has little pictures. It used to belong to my father."

"He has a heart of pure gold," Flora thought.

The next morning the two girls went for a walk. It was New Year's Day. The sun had risen into a cloudless sky. The roads and lanes, moist from the recent thaw, sparkled with the water-washed freshness of spring. "How he would have loved to be out

in a morning like this!" Nelly said. They rested a little on the very bridge where Chris had hidden with Lucy. The woodland stream was now a small torrent that gurgled noisily under the masonry. Flora remembered the place well, but said nothing. Nelly, as she sat on the cold stone, fancied that she was aware of a new sensation in her body.

"It's his life moving again," she thought. "He is not all dead." She looked down at the muddy grass. "Mrs. Husting," she spoke with great nervousness, "I believe I am going to have his baby."

Her words were heard by Flora with jealous pain. Deeply she envied the girl this tangible token of the dead man's love, but this response was speedily replaced by tender concern. "How wonderful! I am so glad, so very glad," she said. Presently she drew near her and kissed her cold cheek. "I want to ask you something. Would you, if I asked you, consent to come abroad with me? We would go to some quiet place in France where I would look after you and where we would not be troubled by any one. It would give some purpose to my life, and I am very unhappy and very lonely."

It was arranged thus, and when the two women reached the mansion they both felt more able to face the future. As they approached the door they heard Caesar barking. Some one was coming up the path to the back door. They walked in that direction, thinking that it might be a person bringing a telegram from Chris's wife, who was expected to arrive at lunchtime. When they emerged from the

yew hedge it turned out to be Mrs. Collet. She was carrying a wreath of ivy in her hand.

“Would you be so kind as to put this on the poor lad’s coffin? ’Tis from my Luce. The child do nothing but cry. She do sit in kitchen with the tears a-dropping on to her apron as if her own father were to be carried to churchyard. I do mind as though ’twere yesterday how he did come and sit down with us so natural-like. ‘Mrs. Collet,’ he did say, ‘your home can’t be beat.’ He were a well-spoken gentleman. There be many who go up to pulpit that be further from heaven than he. But the Lord, he do know all, and will take en safe to thick girt Mansion what he ’ave prepared so merciful for ’is faithful servants; for that poor chap were a good man, and none what knowed him could say contrary.”

Nelly took the wreath. “I will just run up with it,” she said to Flora when they reached the hall.

The girl entered the death-chamber. A coffin supported on three chairs stood at the bottom of the bed. It contained the body of the man she had loved. She could trace the anatomy of the cherished form under the shroud. The feet that had jumped the dyke so lightly made little white glacial mountains at the lower end of the white sheet, the position of the knees was visible, and the knucklebones of the crossed hands. Very gently, very fearfully, she lifted the napkin that covered the face. There it lay before her—the cold white countenance of the boy who had loved her so passionately. She could not speak,

she could not cry. She stood there silenced by the proud beauty of that ruined head.

“Broken, broken, broken, my love is broken,” she cried. “Chris, my own sweet darling, my dear, dear love. Come back to the bracken, come back to our cuckoo copse. You mustn’t go. They can’t take you from me. The hay is mown, the harvest is ready. Oh! I did love you so.”

She bent down to kiss the chilled forehead and as her tears fell upon the impassive mask in the coffin there came to her nostrils, mingled with the smell of varnish, the ancient unmistakable odour that rises from a dead man.



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